

Out of Time | you are not hindered in any way, | there is a separate allocation | There is no  
no separate allocation | this advice was not incorrect nor misleading | communication  
with you should have been more efficient. | the only Out of Time application received.  
In this highly competitive context | competitive in the wider context of the category | de  
cisions are made in competition against all the applications. | our process was not ex  
plained clearly or completely | significant impact | **JOHN** | would have set a precedent  
and have unreasonable implications | I sincerely regret this underlying assumption  
had not been explained satisfactorily | this is | for several reasons | There is no | specific  
reason | The Board has the power | please do not hesitate to contact | thank you fo  
your recent email | unfortunately the conclusions you draw | are | **KELLY** | incorrect | If  
we had time we could discuss these matters, | however I regret that this is not possible  
| As nothing further can be gained by continuing this correspondence | the matter is  
now closed | Out of time | Out of Time | you are not hindered in any way, | there is a  
separate allocation | There is no separate allocation | this advice was not incorrect nor  
misleading | communication with you should have been more efficient. | the only Out o  
Time application received. | In this highly competitive context | competitive in the wide  
context of the category | decisions are made in competition against all the applications  
| our process was not explained clearly or completely | significant impact | would have  
set a precedent | and have unreasonable implications | I sincerely regret this underlying  
assumption | had not been explained satisfactorily | this is | for several reasons | There  
is no | **DECONSTRUCTING** | specific reason | The Board has the power | please do not  
hesitate to contact | thank you for your recent email | unfortunately the conclusions yo  
draw | are | incorrect | If we had time we could discuss these matters, | however I regre  
that this is not possible | As nothing further can be gained by continuing this correspon  
dence | the matter is now closed | Out of time | Out of Time | you are not hindered in  
any way, | there is a separate allocation | There is no separate allocation | this advice  
was not incorrect nor misleading | communication with you should have been more effi  
cient. | the only Out of Time application received. | In this highly competitive context  
competitive in the wider context of the category | decisions are made in competition  
against all the applications. | **AUSTRALIA** | our process was not explained clearly o  
completely | significant impact | would have set a precedent | and have unreasonable  
implications | I sincerely regret this underlying assumption | had not been explained  
satisfactorily | this is | for several reasons | There is no | specific reason | The Board ha  
the power | please do not hesitate to contact | thank you for your recent email | unfortu  
nately the conclusions you draw | are | incorrect | If we had time we could discuss these  
matters, | however I regret that this is not possible | As nothing further can be gained b  
continuing this correspondence | the matter is now closed | Out of time | Out of Time  
you are not hindered in any way | there is a separate allocation | There is no separa

**JOHN KELLY**  
*DECONSTRUCTING*  
*AUSTRALIA*

Curated by Pamela Cunningham

17 DECEMBER 2006  
to 27 APRIL 2007



390 McClelland Drive  
Langwarrin 3910  
Melways Reference 103 E3  
Telephone +61 3 9789 1671  
Facsimile +61 3 9789 1610  
info@mcclellandgallery.com  
www.mcclellandgallery.com  
Open Tuesday – Sunday  
10am – 5pm

**John Kelly**  
**Deconstructing Australia**

McClelland Gallery + Sculpture Park  
390 McClelland Drive  
Langwarrin 3910  
Telephone +61 3 9789 1671  
Facsimile +61 3 9789 1610  
info@mcclellandgallery.com  
www.mcclellandgallery.com

© The Artist and Author  
McClelland Gallery + Sculpture Park

This catalogue is copyright.  
Apart from any fair dealing for the purposes  
of private study, research, criticism, or review  
as permitted by the Copyright Act,  
no part may be reproduced by any other  
process without written permission.

Designed and Printed at  
Altshul Printers, Melbourne

Photography  
Mark Ashkanasy, Melbourne  
Gina Lee, John Kelly

Cover  
'Out of time', poem by John Kelly





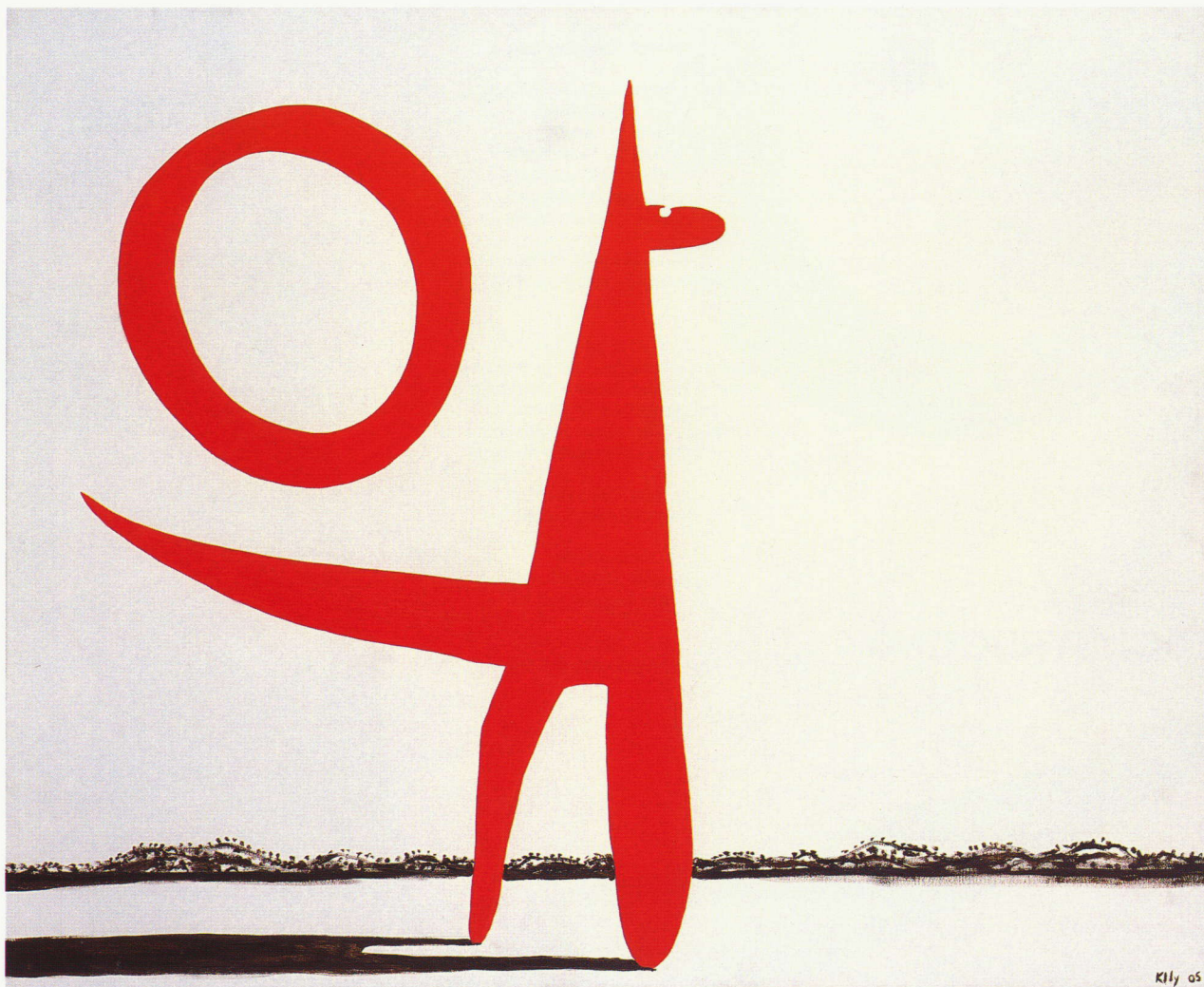
**JOHN**

**KELLY**

**DECONSTRUCTING**

**AUSTRALIA**





*Big foot* 2005 oil on linen 119 x 144.5cm

**John Kelly**  
**Deconstructing Australia**

The word 'deconstruction' is often associated with Postmodernism, a term which in reference to the visual arts alerts the viewer to the source and context of an image, thereby deconstructing both its past and present meanings.

John Kelly is concerned with Australian art history. He appropriates from the modernist traditions of the 1940s and he has a particular reverence for the art of William Dobell and Sidney Nolan. Kelly is best known for his paintings and sculpture based on 'Dobell's cows', however more recently his works have incorporated two principal motifs, one derived from Nolan's *Moonboy* c 1940; the other from the elements of a kangaroo and sun that form the logo of the Australia Council for the Arts.

John Kelly joyfully notes the common Irish ancestry he shares with Sidney Nolan and his Kelly namesake – the anti-establishment hero Ned Kelly. Nolan's *Moonboy*, based on the head of John Sinclair (the former Herald music critic) silhouetted as a flattened yellow circular form against a black background, dominates his present work. Sculptures such as *Alien* 2006 and *Luna Park landscape* 2006 pay homage to Nolan while others such as *Deconstructed monument* 2005 and *Big head* 2005 challenge the aesthetic mandate of the Australia Council.

John Kelly was born in Bristol UK on 12 April 1965, the fourth child born to David (Ben) Kelly of County Cork, and Margaret (nee Smith) of Bristol. His father moved to England for work in the 1950s, and immigrated with his family to Australia six months after John's birth. Settling in the outer Melbourne suburb of Sunshine, the Kelly family grew to seven children, and with David Kelly working at a local quarry, money was in short supply.

After attending Sunshine North Technical School, John Kelly enrolled in a TOP course (Tertiary Orientation Program) at Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in 1982. He had the intention of joining the Graphic Design course, but Colin Jellett, an RMIT painting lecturer, encouraged him to enrol in the Fine Arts course. Kelly was inhibited by lack of funds, however the fortuitous winning of a local radio station 'Win-a-wish' competition by his mother allowed him to attend the Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts – Painting) course from 1983 to 1985. He also found part-time work in the RMIT library which not only assisted him financially, but also afforded him time to read widely and research into the history of Australian art. Other formative influences included artist-lecturers, Andrew Sibley, Peter Ellis and Jon Cattapan, and a then current interest in animism. Jenny Zimmer, another lecturer at RMIT, had organized a major exhibition *Animals and Animism in Art* at the RMIT Gallery, which focused on the power of animal representation from cave paintings of the Paleolithic era to the contemporary era. This interest in the iconic status of animals that occurs within most cultures was to play out significantly in Kelly's later works.

During this period Kelly was producing spontaneous expressionistic figurative works. The art of the 1940s seemed to him distant enough to have its own sense of history with its own traditions, yet still close enough to be relevant and resonant. He was interested in the work of John Perceval and Albert Tucker, and was particularly impressed by Tucker's *Images of Modern Evil* series.





Untitled 1990

In 1988 he was invited to play cricket in the Surrey County Championship, England. His *Cricket* series of 1989–90 featuring deep green backgrounds and quickly drawn figures in motion was his response to the English environment. Time in England made him aware of national difference and his appreciation for the spirit of Australian art was enhanced. He visited numerous galleries and museums; however one of the most memorable experiences was seeing a touring exhibition of Australian Art of the 1940s in three different locations: initially in Melbourne, then Southbank, London and finally in Liverpool. These three different venues highlighted particular works and made him very conscious of context. However the works which seemed to him to transcend all locations with their inventiveness, directness and resonance were those by Sidney Nolan, particularly his Wimmera paintings. For Kelly, who at this time was reading Carl Jung and the power of the archetype, these works embodied the 'antipodean essence'.

In 1988 Kelly held his first solo show at Niagara Galleries, Melbourne and made the acquaintance of Rick Amor (a fellow artist at Niagara) who visited his studio and encouraged him to abandon his spontaneous style of painting with intuitive images drawn from memory, in favour of a more traditional figurative style which emphasized skill and accurate pictorial representation. Also in 1988 he participated in the *Möet & Chandon Travelling Exhibition* with the work *Bellini's Labyrinth* 1987 (oil on canvas, 136.7 x 167.4 cm) which reflected traits of his mature style, such as the use of pictorial elements to illustrate a philosophical idea. Moreover this work revealed his abiding interest in creating a pun with a conceptual reversal that operates after the humorous first reading, and on a formalist level, use of repeating graphic sections and patterns as the setting for a social critique.

The theme of *Bellini's Labyrinth*, and the series from which it comes, was derived in part from his reading of Albert Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* (French 1942, English 1955) in which the author uses the Greek myth to illustrate the philosophy of the 'Absurd' and the futility of life. Sisyphus having transgressed

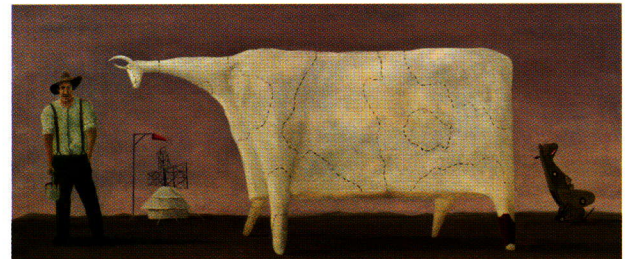


Bellini's labyrinth 1987

was sentenced to the Underworld from which he escaped, only to be condemned by the Gods to the eternal punishment of rolling a stone to the top of a hill to see it inevitably crash back down again. The toil being thus never ending. The labyrinth is the symbolic representation of the existentialist trap of life, while the large central rock in *Bellini's Labyrinth* is a symbolic reference to Kelly's father and his work in the local stone quarry.

The title also alludes to the Renaissance painter Giovanni Bellini (c 1430–1516) and his paintings, such as *St Francis in the desert* c 1480 (Frick, NY) which features a quarry-like setting and bird's-eye viewpoint, while the shape of the hat/coat in Bellini's *The Doge Leonardo Loredon* (c 1501–05) directly echoes the shape of the rock in Kelly's painting.

Kelly's research in the RMIT library allowed him to access to a broad range of topics and to the complete set of back issues of *Art and Australia*. He commenced his Master of Arts at RMIT in 1991 with his topic being *Simulacrum and Sophistry in Image Making*. He defined simulacrum as 'something having merely the appearance of a certain thing without possessing its substance or proper qualities' and throughout history it has been a way of imitating, defying and deceiving perception. Of particular interest to Kelly was the use of camouflage during wartime and his investigation into this provided the inspiration for his *Dobell's Cows* series of paintings and sculpture.



The incident 1992-93

He was familiar with the famous court case of William Dobell's contested win of the Archibald Prize in 1944, when his portrait of Joshua Smith was challenged as a caricature, and in his thesis he quoted from an article he found in the National Gallery of Victoria library, *'The Unforgettable (Sir Bill) Dobell'* written by Dr William MacMahon, the surgeon who operated on Dobell and was later the subject of Dobell's third Archibald Prize win:

When World War II broke out, Bill (Dobell) served first as a camouflage labourer, later as an artist recording the work of the Civil Construction Corps, which built airfields and other defence projects. As a camouflage artist, he was one of a group of several, later famous, artists who had been ordered to make papier-mâché cows and move them around the base in the hope of fooling Japanese pilots. (Said Bill, "I think the authorities underestimated the eyesight of the Japanese airmen".) For almost a year he shared a hut with fellow-artist, Joshua Smith.

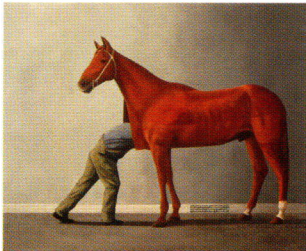
Kelly was also interested to learn that Joshua Smith's job had been to paint cabbages on the runways. The absurdist and surreal nature of the idea of making faux cows for the war effort appealed to Kelly's sense of humour – encapsulating both the Irish trait of larrikinism and the Australian sense of anti-establishment.

Kelly had seen the late works of Philip Guston in a touring exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in the 1980s, which he admired for their narrative content, humour, and use of graphic cartoon-like style, particularly the use of graphic dotted lines. He later incorporated a similar dotted line into his *Dobell's Cows* paintings to define the area of potential camouflage.



One of the constituent elements of humour is a sudden reversal of the expected. Such game playing is an unusual element within art, with fine art often cloaked in a mantle of contemplation and slow meditative enlightenment. For Kelly the humorous narrative, the clarity of the visual pun with a mirror to established attitudes and institutions, is integral to his art.

In 1995 Kelly was awarded an Anne & Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship which enabled him to study at the Slade School of Art, London, from 1996 to 1997. The *Dobell's Cows* series had continued from



Man looking into Phar Lap 1997

1991 to 1996, and its culmination was to be the major sculpture *Cow up a tree* 1999, conceived in Melbourne prior to his departure for London. During this period in England he attempted to combine Australian icons, such as Phar Lap, with an English landscape and the resulting exhibition, *Painting the Dead Horse* was opened by Barry Humphries at

The Piccadilly Gallery. The exhibition represented Kelly's conscious effort to both draw upon and to create his own history by using his experience and knowledge of Australian art, and he enjoyed the incongruity of mixing different national ethos.

While overseas, his work came to the attention of the organizers of the *Les Champs de la Sculpture 2000*, the end-of-millennium Paris celebration in which 50 international sculptors' works were displayed along the Champs Élysées.

As the Australian representative, Kelly nominated a full size bronze version of his *Cow up a tree* sculpture, of which he made a maquette in his Melbourne studio. This was to be a major and costly undertaking; a full scale plaster model was created and then cast in bronze at the Coubertin Foundry, Paris. It was displayed for four months in Paris to great popular acclaim, and after the exhibition, was acquired for Docklands, Melbourne where it is now located.



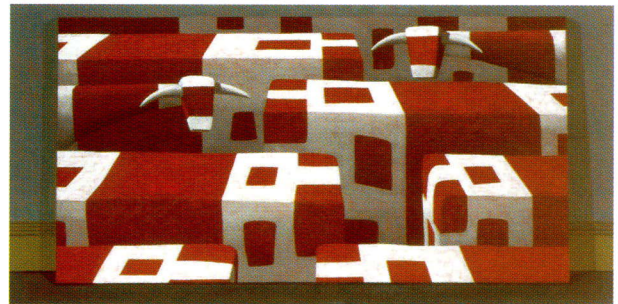
Cow up a tree 1999

To help fund this work, Kelly made unsuccessful application to the Australia Council and other Australian funding institutions which, combined with a falling out with his Parisian associate, left him disillusioned with mainstream systems. When, in 2002, he was invited to participate in *La Parade des Animaux* in the gardens of the Casino of Monte Carlo, he again applied to the Australia Council for assistance. However, although successful, the grant, with its standard requirement of acknowledgement and reproduction of the Australia Council logo, was received after the catalogue had gone to press, so Kelly sought permission to acknowledge and use the logo in his next exhibition.



Trois vaches en pilee 2002

During the flight back to Melbourne from London in 2002 he read Naomi Klein's *No Logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs* (Flamingo-HarperCollins, 2001) in which she challenges the proliferation of brand-name culture and the ubiquitous globalization of branding. He had experienced negative



Big red labyrinth 2000

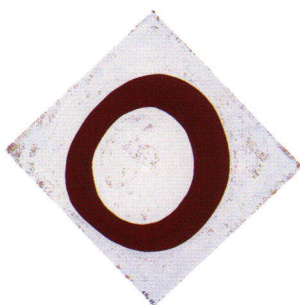
branding himself, having been disparagingly known as the 'cow man' and had even titled an exhibition ironically *More fucking cows!* at Niagara Galleries in 2000. This contained paintings such as *Big red labyrinth* 2000 which combined his earlier maze/labyrinth theme - perhaps now more a symbol for the frustrations of bureaucracy - with the cows and their camouflage representing the heritage of deception, all adding to a visually entertaining conflagration of colour, patterns and shapes.

Consolidating Klein's no logo thesis was Kelly's familiarity with Kalle Lasn's book *Culture Jam: The Uncooling of America* (William Morrow & Company, 1999) and later its companion *Culture Jam: How to Reverse America's Suicidal Consumer Binge - And Why We Must* (Harper, 2000). Kalle Lasn, founder of the magazine *Adbuster*, aggressively critiqued contemporary mass media consumerism and propounded a philosophy that aimed to reverse information indoctrination by overloading and jamming the system, in order to reverse the psychology of logo branding by giving it the status of being 'uncool'.



Kelly's 2002 exhibition in London at the Piccadilly Gallery was titled *Culture Jam*. In the accompanying catalogue he reproduced the Australia Council corporate logo as requested along with their correspondence about its correct use. However, as an act of cultural jamming, Kelly included elements of the logo within each of the art works. The only exceptions to the appropriated Australia Council logo were two works in which Kelly used the motif of Nolan's *Moonboy* - the yellow circular head and neck against a black background. With variations and overlaps, the two sets of motifs, the *Moonboy* and the Australia Council logo, have formed the basis of most of Kelly's work, both paintings and sculptures, from 2002 up to the present.

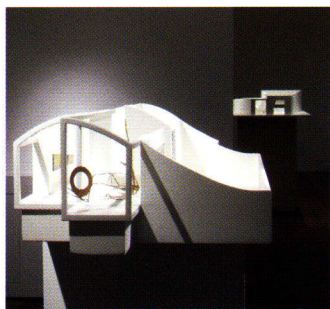
Another project that evolved at this time was literary: a set of concrete poems based on Kelly's correspondence with the Australia Council. Published as an artist's book, it included his correspondence and emails to the Australia Council that questioned the veracity of the newly published report *Australians and the Arts*, commissioned by the Council in 2000 from the international advertising and marketing firm Saatchi & Saatchi, about strategies for marketing and re-branding the arts. Kelly questioned the 'out-of-date' branding concept and its implied conformity to the corporate mould that would be required of the arts - the 'bureaucratic hegemony that decides whether art fits its arbitrary mould'.



Ern 2003

Kelly admired the heretical hoax of the Ern Malley poems of the 1940s when two disgruntled writers created a fictional author Ern Malley and a set of his surrealist poems which Max Harris, the editor of the avant-garde journal *Angry Penguins*, published with high praise. Harris, like Sidney Nolan was associated with the avant-garde group around John and Sunday Reed and the Heide group.

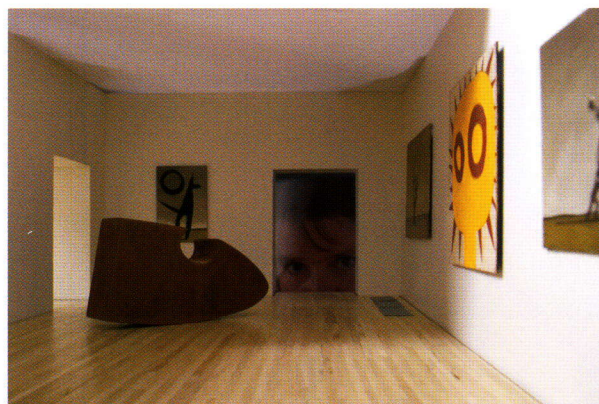
The question of identity has always been of interest to Kelly who holds three passports: British, Irish and Australian. He is proud of this Celtic/Australian heritage which he hypothetically utilizes in his *Multiple Cultural Identities Project* of imaginary miniature exhibitions of his work, both paintings and sculptures, displayed with authentically scaled-down architectural models of various prestigious venues. Conceived under the group title *There was an Englishman, an Australian and an Irishman* the first part of the project, representing Australia, was shown at Niagara Galleries in 2005.



Installation, Niagara Galleries, Melbourne

The theoretical venues selected by Kelly for part one were: the

Australian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale and ACCA (Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne). The second part of the project shown at The Piccadilly Gallery, London in 2006, showed Kelly as a British invitee at the Tate Modern, London and the British Pavilion at the Venice Biennale. The third is an Irish hypothetical, yet to be realized, again with two miniaturized venues - the first set in an imaginary Irish Pavilion for the Venice Biennale based on an Irish High Cross (Ireland does not have a pavilion at Venice), and a model of the new Glucksman Gallery, a contemporary art gallery at the University of Cork.



John Kelly in model 2005

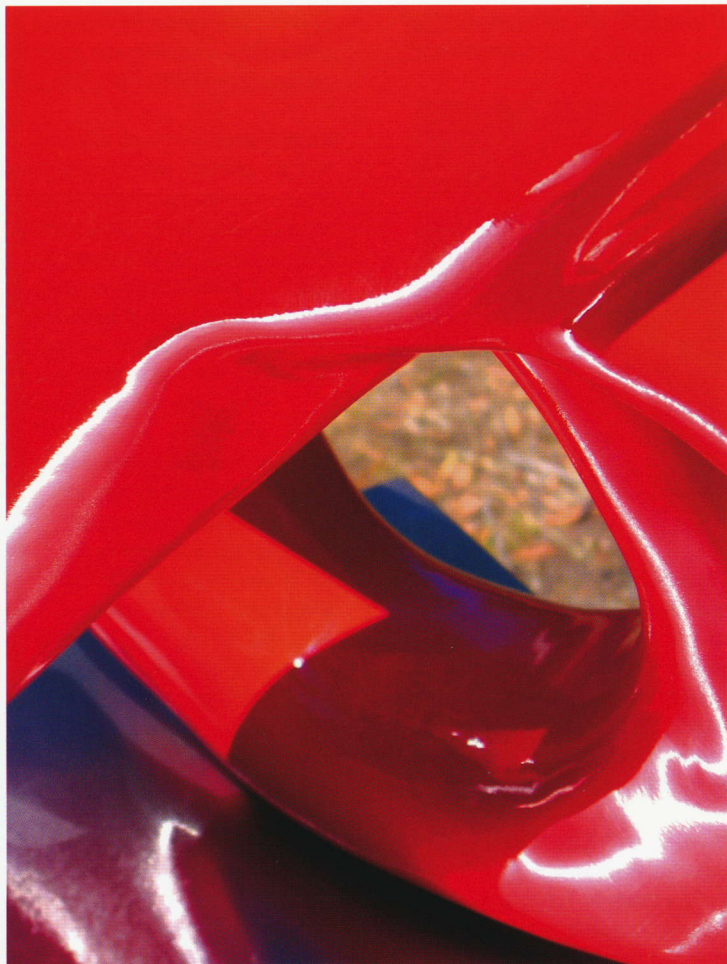
*John Kelly Deconstructing Australia* consists of seven monumental sculptures which are derived and developed from the Australia Council logo and the Moonboy motif. In the spirit of Postmodernism, Kelly has deconstructed moments in Australian art history with a determined and self-deprecating humour. Sculptures reference his paintings and paintings reference his sculpture. In the grounds of the sculpture park, the superbly sublime constructions, through their intriguing arrangement of monolithic steel and bronze elements, form an enigmatic visual landscape.

The ongoing *Multiple Cultural Identities Project* which began in 2004 represents John Kelly searching in part for an identity, but one that is now international, just as his earlier work consciously explored the Australian art traditions of his immediate past, through the art of the 1940s and specifically through the work of Dobell and Nolan. Now living in Ireland and exhibiting regularly in England and Australia his ambition is to be understood within an international context and through a wider reading of art history.

Robert Lindsay  
Director  
McClelland Gallery+Sculpture Park





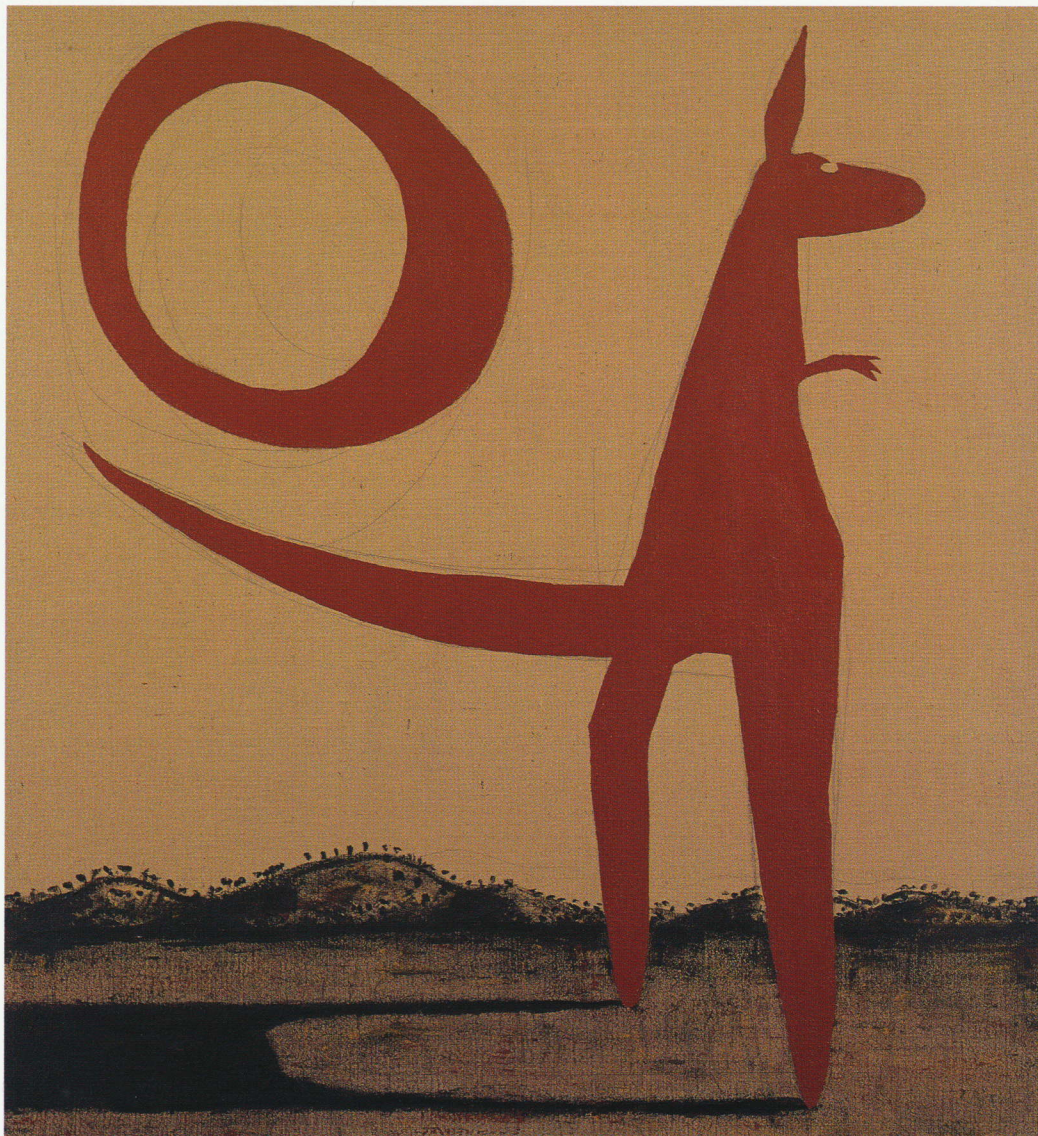


*Blot on the landscape* 2002 painted bronze, stainless steel base 177 x 87 x 45cm









*Pooka in the landscape* 2004 acrylic on canvas 184 x 166cm  
*Maquette for Public monument* 2003 corten steel 274 x 205 x 91.5cm







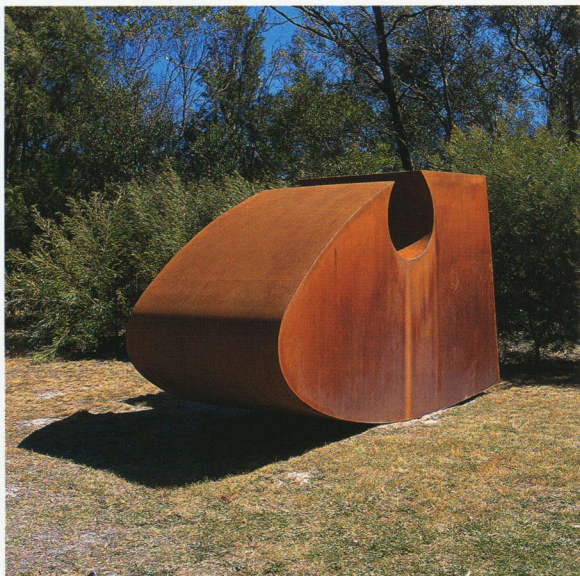
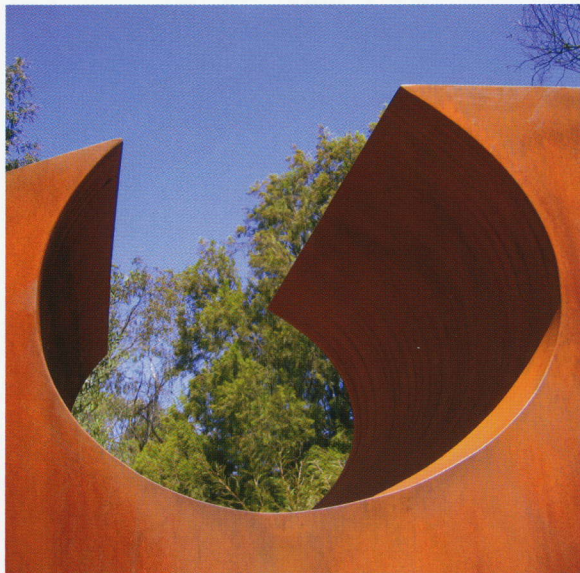


*Deconstructed monument* 2006 oil on canvas 162 x 196cm  
*Deconstructed monument* 2005 corten steel 500 x 200 x 240cm







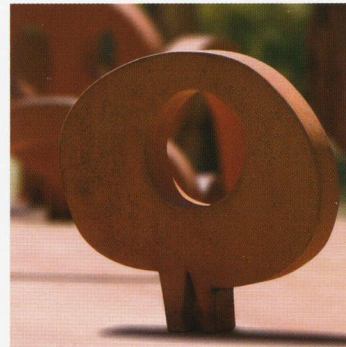
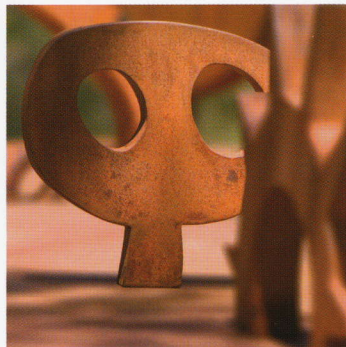
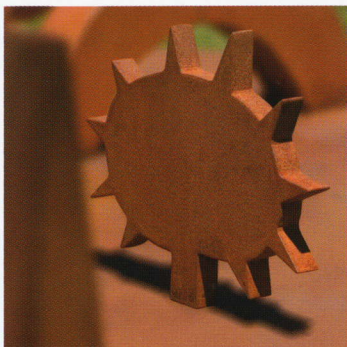


*Big head* 2005 corten steel 210 x 380 x 120cm









*Luna Park landscape* 2006 corten steel 115 x 480 x 240cm









*Self portrait as a parasite* 2006 oil on canvas 162 x 196cm  
*Alien* 2006 corten steel 394 x 360 x 32cm









*Chasing the visual element* 2006 corten steel 240 x 600 x 120cm







McClelland Gallery+Sculpture Park acknowledges the assistance of their sponsors and supporters:



**AIDAN J GRAHAM PTY LTD**



**J K FASHAM**



**WHITECLELAND**  
LAWYERS, CONSULTANTS & NOTARIES



**NIAGARA**  
GALLERIES  
[www.niagara-galleries.com.au](http://www.niagara-galleries.com.au)

**ARTS  
VICTORIA**

The artist also wishes to thank Derek John and Julie Collins of D & J Projects; Neale Kenny; Mark Ashkanasy; Bill Nuttall, Gina Lee, Jessica Love and Leah Holscher of Niagara Galleries; Christina and Oscar and family.





390 McClelland Drive  
Langwarrin 3910  
Melways Reference 103 E3  
Telephone +61 3 9789 1671  
Facsimile +61 3 9789 1610  
info@mcclellandgallery.com  
www.mcclellandgallery.com  
Open Tuesday – Sunday  
10am – 5pm

ISBN 0-9578963-9-5



9 780957 896390

Out of Time  
you are not hindered in any way,  
there is a separate allocation  
There is no separate allocation  
this advice was not incorrect nor misleading  
communication with you should have been more efficient  
the only Out of Time application received  
In this highly competitive context  
competitive in the wider context of the category  
decisions are made in competition against all the applications  
our process was not explained clearly or completely  
significant impact  
would have set a precedent  
and have unreasonable implications  
I sincerely regret this underlying assumption  
had not been explained satisfactorily  
this is

for several reasons

There is no

specific reason

The Board has the power

please do not hesitate to contact

thank you for your recent email

unfortunately the conclusions you draw

are

incorrect

If we had time we could discuss these matters,

however I regret that this is not possible

As nothing further can be gained by continuing this correspondence

the matter is now closed

Out of time

you are not hindered in any way,

there is a separate allocation

There is no separate allocation

this advice was not incorrect nor misleading

communication with you should have been more efficient.

the only Out of Time application received.

In this highly competitive context