

LUST

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to accompany the exhibition "LUST", held at the Pinson Gallery
Centre for the Arts, Hunter St, Hobart 10, 31 May 1991.

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Artist, writers and the University of Tasmania.

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Foreword

There is little that can be said, discursively, about Lust; either it speaks for itself or not at all. This collection of short stories and the exhibition it accompanies are presented in order to allow just that to happen. The theme was chosen to encourage the artists and writers, and hopefully their audience, to consider the raw experiential and existential drives, imperatives and frustrations that, when expressed in art, are ultimately responsible for art's insistence in our lives.

David McDowell

L U S T

A m y F o r r e s t

I have never babysat for my sister since she went in to have her third. She never asked again and I never offered. I've seen her and her husband and three kids, mostly at barbecues when the family gets together, but for two years we've mainly talked about the potato salad and patterns for dresses. She doesn't talk that much anyway.

I didn't expect her to ask me to mind the kids, she doesn't think I'm too good at caring for them. I get cranky and yell when they don't see reason. She believes there is no conscience or reason for anyone till their age gets up into double numbers, and until then it's just better to love and forgive. Peace and quiet mean more to her than anything. It makes me mad, though, to see her bending over to wipe their messes and muddling through without much help. Her husband is devoted to her, but he's not much use in the house. So things get a bit tense when I mind the kids.

Joel was three and a half then. Aaron was five, but on that day he went to his first kids party. His dad took him in to look at his new brother on the way, and that left just Joel and me in the house. I didn't like Joel as much as I liked Aaron. Aaron mainly roamed around and played by himself. He fit into things however they were and sometimes you wouldn't even know he was around. Whereas Joel seemed to think the whole universe had to arrange itself just around him. You had to entertain him from the moment he woke and he could get nasty

if he felt like he was being ignored for even a few minutes. When Aaron was around, Joel mostly followed him everywhere and bugged him, but that day the privilege was all mine.

Things were okay at the start. We got a few apples off the tree and he helped me sort out the ones with moth from the good ones. It was a warm day and I nearly took him for a swim in the dam but when we went the water was so low you had to wade through a whole lot of mud before you could even get wet. We had a swing instead, and Joel started playing with a bit of old rope he found down at the dam. I just sat there on the swing thinking about my boyfriend and a few times I held my hips in my hands the way he did the Saturday before. All I had to think about was how he put his hands there to settle me underneath him, and I would start feeling real sexy.

Joel started throwing the rope at my face, trying to crack it like a whip, and it was annoying me. I said to him a few times, don't do that, and started to get angry. It's funny how with Joel I often forgot I was bigger than him. Eventually I grabbed the end of the rope and started pulling him towards me. He pulled back, but I was winning, and he looked right into my eyes and I could see he hated me. I let go. It didn't matter that much, and I remembered what my sister said about reason. He decided to tie me up instead, and I was in a good humour by then so I let him. I could have got up and burst out any time, but I just sat there and said help help occasionally while he wound the rope around me. He breathed hard while he pushed my arms down behind my back and tied the knots, then he went off to look



Jane Burton

From the series *Spoil II* 1991

Colour photograph, 11.5 x 11.5cm (without frame)

for more rope and I went back into my daydream.

When he didn't come back for a good while I realised he must have gone back to the dam. I pulled off the knots and cursed myself and ran but he was just sitting in the mud with his pants off. I was so relieved, I picked him up and kissed him, mud and all. I liked him then, and when he was in the bath all clean and peachy I liked him so much I could have put his willie in my mouth.

It would have been a small sweet harmless thing when I think about it now, and maybe things would have turned out different if I had just done that one thing. But I felt kind of cheated and maybe that's what made me forget to close the door when I took a shower. I was soaping up my hair when he came in and I didn't say anything, I just watched him while I rinsed my hair and washed the mud off my legs. At the time I thought, well, he's surprised that here's someone who looks like his mother, but I know I was getting a big charge out of it. I moved the soap up and down over my body, and he stared at my hands and squeezed his willie between his fingers. I washed between my legs and paid particular attention to my breasts and wished he was a man. When I started to think, this is getting a bit sick, I said let's have a sandwich and started to rough him up all playful to stop him staring. He had gone so still and quiet it was spooky.

There was a tantrum over the sandwich because I put the wrong kind of meat in it but it made things feel a little more normal. Joel went off in a huff to his mother's room and when I went in after him he was sound asleep. I sneaked in beside him on the creaking bed

and when I woke up in the hot still middle of the afternoon he was gone. I could hear him playing with his stove and talking about apple jam in the next room so I lay there touching myself and thinking about the weekend.

There's a point in proceedings when you stop looking at the wallpaper and when I opened my eyes I heard the door close and there was my sister's husband looking at me. He just stared, and I stared right back at him, and I recognised that look. He could have laughed and said caught you and I could have pulled the sheet up, but he didn't and I didn't, and I had never wanted him before but I did then.

"Where's Joel?" I said. His eyes never left me but he jerked his head indoors. His hand stayed on the doorknob, and I looked at the hair growing red and thick on the back of it and thought of those hands on my hips and I thought about what my sister said about the age of reason and I knew her husband thought differently. I looked at his hand on the doorknob and I was afraid he would leave.

"Is he okay?" I said. He nodded. His eyes slid to my jeans on the floor. I grew uncomfortable. "He gave me the devil of a time," I started off in a conversational voice. "First we picked some apples and that was okay, and then we were going to go for a swim but boy, that dam is really low, so we had a swing instead, and then we played around with some rope, Joel really ties a mean knot and then..."

He interrupted me. "Are you tired?"

"Tired?"

"You should just be quiet and rest." His hand left the door. He

L U S T

sat carefully on the edge of the bed like a doctor and pulled the sheet up over me. My sister had embroidered that sheet at high school. I was relieved.

"You lie here and rest," he said soothingly. "Don't worry about Joel. He's fine, he's just fine."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure I'm sure," he said, smoothing down the sheet across my shoulders and digging his fingers along my collarbone. The pressure made my legs twitch.

"I'm hot," I complained in a little girl voice. I wanted to put myself in his hands and have it over quickly. Something might happen before it was done, and I wanted to stop him staring at me. Joel was making train noises now and those stroking hands were starting to bother me.

"Maybe you're tired too," I said.

"Oh I am. Very tired. Very very tired." But he just kept smoothing down the sheet. I started to feel tense.

"Could you show me how to rest? I feel sort of jumpy." The hands stopped. He looked around nervously. The house was quiet, but the door was closed.

"Sure I'll show you. But it's a secret." His eyes reached into me and I had run out of words so I just pulled down the sheet.

He didn't lift me straight into him like my boyfriend. In fact, it was kind of weird. He made me lie dead straight on the bed and he got down on the floor to look while he opened and closed my legs. He

must have done it about thirty times. Occasionally he put his finger in and while it was wet he drew something on the front of my body. I couldn't see anything except the ceiling, he wouldn't let me look. Then he turned me over. I was afraid then, but he held my hands to the bedpost and moved in real slow. From then on in I guess it was pretty normal.

My sister got out of hospital a couple days later, and I never babysat again. That afternoon in her bedroom I had no regrets, not even when I saw little Joel standing outside with his train looking straight at me while his daddy's hands kept mine on the post. That man paid so much attention to the door he clean forgot the blind. But Joel had the same eyes as his father that day, he wanted to see what he saw. I just wish he didn't still have that look now.



Merrin Eirth
Fragile Imposition 1990
Mixed media on canvas, 38 x 26cm

E A S Y

Edward Colless

Two girls were whispering out in the hall. One of them tried to stifle a laugh which died as a furtive sob. After that there was a single word, low and composed but indistinct, and then abrupt squeaks from a pair of sneakers scuffing quickly down the lino in the corridor. Then it was still, the kind of heavy lull that someone inching in owl-light across a bedroom feels when ambushed by a tiny rustle of the sheets, and he halts rigid like a thief and tries to measure out his breathing to conceal it under the slow sighing coming from the pillows. He opened his eyes and stared up at where the street light cut a splayed vent in the smut above the bed. The ceiling paint was dull and filmy, it looked like a slack membrane sagging into the stale air. A chill fluorescent tint crept into the deeper shadows. He thought of the air through the whole city itself being stained dark and still slightly damp, as if it had absorbed an unpleasant moisture like seepage from off the speckled lino floors, the unwashed plates, or the sunken mattresses, from off any surface that collected liquids. One of the older men across the room jerked into a desperate, stinging snore behind a curtain. It was an ugly, sharp rattle from back of the nose that sounded like heavy wet canvas being torn. He listened to the pitch rise to a gulp and then subside as the air went out. Then it came again, steadier this time, a deep flapping energy opening a fissure for a while in the old man's suffocating sleep. By the third or fourth time it would settle into a rhythm like patient

sucking that might last for half an hour. He'd heard it often before, when the night got to him like this and he lay there wondering if anyone else in the ward was awake and whether it would be worth buzzing the girl at the hall desk for a tablet yet. He could count on that half hour before the cramp tightened in his chest.

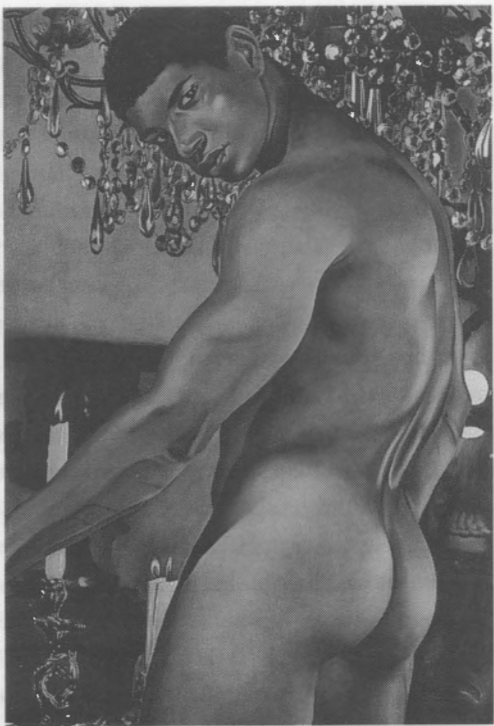
The first time Lucy had phoned, from wherever it was she'd taken off to with the car packed out, had been around this hour in just this kind of dirty, smeared light. "Did I wake you?" she'd asked sarcastically. "Where are you?" he'd said. "What's it to you?" she answered, and added straight away, "I could be a hundred miles away. I could be just down the street. Nervous?" She must have drawn in heavily on a cigarette close to the mouthpiece. He could hear a faint crackle of tobacco flaring up with her breath, and pictured that sore little ruby bloom in the dark he'd seen so often at the end of the bed, when she'd crawled out from under him and settled herself down there for a session of brooding accusation. "Is your girlfriend awake?" she suddenly asked. "Maybe I should introduce myself to her. We could have a bitch about you on the phone while she sits onto your face. You think she'd like it that way?" "I'm alone," he said. "Poor baby," she replied, "left cold on his own." "I'm alone in the room," he said, "she's in the bath." "Oh yeah, at this hour?" she smirked, and then corrected her naivety: "And so who's the slut supposed to be?" He had an image of a woman's long fingers gripping the telephone, with her hair dropping loosely around her hand as she tilted her head

while a dry voice droned out of the earpiece. She was shifting slightly on her knees, creasing her weight into the bedsheets to open up her flexed thighs a bit further and ease herself gently down into some dim mouth wet in between her legs. He listlessly composed a few names before his eyes, but couldn't get anything clear in mind so he didn't speak but sat silently in the chair with the phone at his ear. He heard Lucy's cigarette again, unhurried and shallow now. She cut the call off before she'd finished exhaling. He held on for a minute, listening to the tone. "You piece of fuck," he whispered into the dead line.

The night hadn't always treated him like this, like it was the medium of listless thinking. When he was a child or sometimes as an adolescent and he lay feverish and insomniac at home, the darkness of two or three a.m. seemed to have a downy pile and any vague glow from the hallway around the door could stroke it and lift it like the slow shimmer on electric fur. He could enjoy the creep of something murky and animal that worked about his limbs in a languid warmth and settled, cupped, over his groin. Back then it was how he liked to imagine falling asleep with a woman might be, a kind of scented weight swelling and exhaling as it coiled a few fingers sluggishly, unconsciously, around the solid but fatigued rigging between his legs. But as things turned out he felt it, that sort of somnolent comfort he associated with depletion, only in fractions. His scheming was rewarded by a drowsy, inconclusive security. It privately gave him just the bare edge of success that kept him a touch anxious, itemising

the disconnected fits and rushes of intimacy as if they could have added up to a single unmysterious scene somewhere in his life. He didn't feel too bad that it hadn't. He felt like he'd almost pulled off a good deal; as if someone had got suspicious at the last moment and backed down, but he could congratulate himself for getting so easily that far into the cheat, and if he reviewed the score he could lean back in the chair and kick his feet out in front with his arms smugly folded across his belly. In the early days with Lucy, before he gave it up and let the discontent head the wrong way, she would casually rest her arm across his shoulders while he steered the car home leisurely late into the night. He could glance down at her limp hand cosy in the glow of the dashboard lights and rolling in the wedge of her lap with each corner. When he felt comfortable it was because he'd used someone in little ways that hadn't drastically damaged them. "They recover," he'd say to himself then, "we all do." But not now, now there was something stagnant or septic about the darkness, and treacherous as a skin of black ice on a pavement.

Lucy's calls had become regular, three or four nights in a row, each month for about a year until, he guessed, she drifted off with her new man into a life that didn't need a scapegoat any more. He'd figured the calls were geared to her periods: she used to get resentful about having to endure the pain, and anguished over the countdown on her childlessness. She would try to bait him. "Know what I'm wearing tonight?" she'd said in an inspired huff, not bothering with



Matthijs Gerber

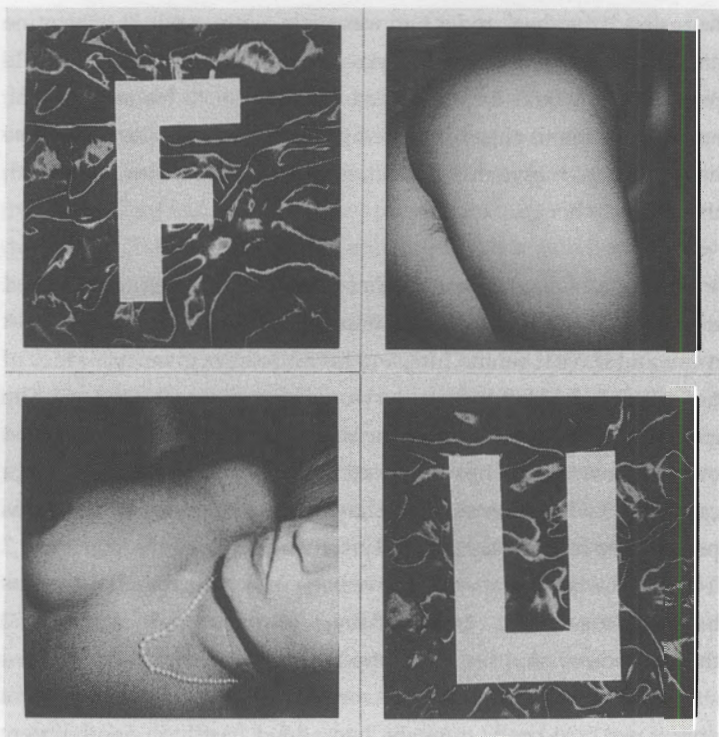
Nude 1990

Oil on canvas, 240 x 165cm

an answer. "I got one of those lacy, ribbed French corselets you used to talk about. With the shoulder straps coming up around the side of the breast rather than from the top. You were so right about how it would fit my figure. Bob bought it for me, but I suppose it was my present to him. He gets so flushed when I undo my blouse and he sees my breasts swelling when I take in a breath. He drags me straight onto the floor." She laughed almost spitefully, "He's such an easy lay sometimes." When she taunted him like this he would try to think of the nameless girl on her knees in the bed, rocking and bobbing slightly with the slick stroke of a tongue up inside her, and purring damply into the mouthpiece. "Is Bob there?" he asked once, when he felt more sure than usual of the man's existence. "He doesn't want to speak to you," she answered, "but he's with me whenever I call you. He knows I'm not unfaithful. I slipped my panties off for him just before I rang ... remember the baggy silk ones? Get this — I'm lying on my back on the sofa with my feet pulled up near my little ass. My stockings are on the floor just near the phone." She went quiet for a moment, as if she was considering her next thought, and her lips made a sweet, distant hiss. "When I stretch out one leg and lower it to the floor, I can show myself to Bob. I tease him this way. I've got my hand over it now and he can't see it, even when I move my fingers around a little, and feel it getting slippery." She kept her voice close in his ear, "I could slide them in for you, real easy, if you wanted." His eyes had opened up to the darkness and he peered through it to the dirty shirts and socks in a pile beside the bed. He hadn't been to the laundromat in three weeks,

he realised; the sheet under him was sticky with an odour of nicotine and sweat. He spoke blandly, "Aren't you wearing a tampon?" He presumed it would have sounded tactless, but to his surprise she answered without anger or contempt. "No," she said simply, and he heard perhaps the creak of the sofa as she must have leaned over with the phone to hang up on him.

It had taken almost another year of silence before he settled into accepting that she'd given it away. By then he knew he could move and leave it behind him, and he'd also been given a fair idea of how much he had left and how he would be spending the end of it. The coughing would sometimes go for hours. There were patches of blood on his pillow. It took heavier doses to get to sleep. She'd sent him a card a little while after she must have decided to stop calling. It was postmarked in his own suburb. "I just thought I should let you know," it read, "I carried what would have been your baby for a few months back then when I left. I called it Baby. I don't know why. We lost it. I thought you should know. I suppose it's the decent thing to do. I should have told you. It's sad. It worried me for a while but it doesn't now. Lucy." At the bottom she had added hastily in another pen, probably just before it was mailed, "You dumb fucker." He'd laughed at that, and felt a burning pinch in his lungs.



Sean Kelly
Detail of sketch for *Blood and Wine* 1991
Polaroid photographs

A F T E R

Clifford Davy

Watching him from the side of the room, she pressed her hands together between her tired legs. His breathing was steady now, but he was still hunched over with his hands firmly gripping the wooden edge of the table that he sat upon; perspiration from his forehead fell occasionally to the linoleum. She looked past the edge of light following the tensed muscles in his shoulders to the door left half open. Its glass panels offered a distorted reflection of the dim passage to the front entrance and the slowing shimmering glow of distant hill fires beyond. The red threatening disaster was distant: soon it would be fading with the approaching dawn, but still now the dim glow wavered upon black, and trees silhouetted in the night moved as though caught in a slow dance with an incandescent sky.

As a small child she had sat on the front porch alone watching as a fire edged its way around the side of the nearby hill toward her house. There were no near neighbours, no telephone. High on the hill, cut into the trees, was a big weatherboard place, the white greying with years of slowing rain. Wrapped in smoke it remained silent. Later, as the strange light of evening began to seep through the gully, the firemen had turned up. They were back-burning, pushing the fire upon itself, and drinking stubbies. She stood next to the old truck with its big red water tank and cans with long nozzles smelling of petrol watching the flames baring a blackberry patch. At the far end of the



Michael Narozny

***Hot Talk* 1990**

Oil on canvas, 122 x 152cm

A f t e r

vehicle her father spoke to one of the firemen. He had declined the Melbourne Bitter but laughed at the jokes of the men with dried heavy black streaks running down their faces. She caught their laughter and the rumble of their deep voices between the sharp crackling in the bush. Just someone having another go at the old cunt. She felt that the men's voices became subdued as they looked toward her, like always happened when her father said things that he didn't want her to hear. But he did tell her later that evening that the fire was deliberately lit. It wasn't for a long time after though till she learnt why. She hadn't often seen the old man that lived in the house on the hill. She remembered seeing him with a young wife once or twice. That was after the the first one had left. Or maybe she had died. Anyway, the young one had left too, but she would keep going back. Sometimes she would hear them fight - probably over the little girl. It turned out later that the wife had discovered him doing something terrible with the child and told the police. The old man had managed to avoid a sentence, but the locals weren't going to let him get off. That sort of thing angers people more than murder.

She recalled a picture she had seen from an old film; a man sat with a child on his lap, his eyes were closed as he scratched his chin. The girl, with skirt slightly awry, stared ahead of her, distracted. Somehow that look of the child was how she still felt herself to be. Her childhood seemed such a long way away, but she knew it wasn't that far. And, although everyone told her it was different to what she was now, she knew that they weren't right.

One of her teachers, when she was young and lived on that small island, had said that it shouldn't be like this. Love shouldn't be separation. Then she was dubious; and now what she'd like was some gin. She'd finished it off some time ago so she sat and just watched the figure on the table instead. He'd watched her. Drawing her jeans back on she had stood side on to his gaze. She knew that he liked seeing her tug at the heavy cotton, drawing it up over the light fabric beneath. She wouldn't linger over it. He'd stare at the denim falling into the curve beneath her waist. Standing before him she would watch his eyes staring either at the fraying weave of cloth or into his own imaginings. Then she would turn and sit in the chair; when she got there his gaze would be on the ground. She wasn't sure, perhaps he was staring at the french bra next to her chair. It was a concession that she made for him, knowing that he preferred that cut: just now though she regretted that kindness. It would have been better too if she had put it back on, but with this heat the fabric would be heavy with damp. Despite the warmth in the morning air, she had pulled the thin cardigan around her: the cool film of perspiration on her body made her shiver. Either that or the way he tried to comfort her afterwards. She drew away from the hand on her shoulder, its tentativeness making greater claims than a firm grasp. It would be better if she had stayed, she knew that her withdrawal would make him believe that he loved her. At least he didn't say anything, she had to give him credit for that.

Last night she had decided not to return to this room. Then, there had been a fresh stillness in the morning street as she stepped



Megan Walch
Lust Mandala 1991
Mixed media on bedsheet, 180 x 180cm

out, the air laden with the cool energy that follows an electric storm. The rain had finished over an hour ago but a heavy current still flowed down the gutter. Lightened clouds hung low with the wasted red glow of the city, engulfing it in its own dismal saturation. She didn't know where to go: she knew where she wanted to be, but she would make sure that she didn't head in the direction of her love. She knew that she would not be able to tell this one of her desire; her lips would destroy the silence that made him hers.

Sitting in the chair, she stared at the heavy veins wrapping their way up the arm clasping the table. She hadn't told him what she knew he had already accepted a long time before. There was no reason to tell him; just frustration, the need to delight in despair (she was tempted). Yes, he knew of her other love, that she didn't love him - his silence now confirmed it. He would try to imagine her desire: once he had said that her love was merely the delusion of need - a need that she would never want to be satisfied. He had told her of the ape that, when it was given a piece of charcoal, drew the bars of its cage. In the past he had spoken to prove that he understood, but now he remained silent. She knew that he would still have it wrong: he thought that she imagined he was someone else, the other one, when he was beneath her. He couldn't understand that it was not even that; it was nobody at all. Watching him now she didn't know why she had returned. It wasn't even lust. There was only a need. Not for him. Perhaps not even for the one in the house that she did pass last night (it was silent, no lights were on).

A f t e r

In the early morning after the fire, she and her father walked up the road looking at the burnt out hill. Winter fog wrapped itself around black trunks set in snow. The heavy smell of ash and smoke, and the heat from the trees and the ground shocked her. She was tired, she had stayed awake all the night listening to trees exploding and crashing to the ground. She had watched a massive plume of sparks spray out from the top of an ancient gum, and her father with his heavy arm keeping her back would talk of Guy Fawkes, and how he had thrown split fire-crackers onto a bonfire of old furniture when he was her age. She waited for him to tell her about his childhood, but he became silent. She had looked up at him, watched his tense jaw as he looked through the blue morning air.

She watched the reflection in the door pane. She would get up in a minute and walk toward it, pass through, heading down the hall to the outside door. He would watch her silhouette as it moved down the pale blue corridor, the dim glow of red ahead of her. She would listen to her shoes on the board floor, the steady scratching of worn leather. Still sitting with her hands tense in her lap, she looked at him staring at the drips on the floor (almost dry now, just stains), and thought that a faint smile was upon his lips, a twist in the corner of his mouth.



Alex Wanders

Lust: the Second Circle 1991

Oil on board, 36.7cm diameter

Artists & Writers

Jane Burton is completing her B.F.A. (Hons.) at the Tasmanian School of Art. She has exhibited in group exhibitions in Hobart and participated in film and performance projects.

Edward Colless was born in Sydney. He lives and works in exile as a lecturer at the Tasmanian School of Art. He has made one short film and writes art criticism and fiction.

Clifford Davy has a B.A. (Hons.) and a Graduate Diploma in Librarianship from the University of Tasmania. He was the founding editor of *Preludes*, a Tasmanian literary magazine. He lives in Hobart and writes free-lance.

Merrin Eirth has worked as a tutor at the Victorian College of the Arts and Victoria College, Prahran. In 1987 she was awarded a residency at the Australia Council's PS.1 Studio in New York. She lives and exhibits regularly in Melbourne.

Amy Forrest lives in Melbourne. She is a librarian engaged part-time in research on a PhD topic entitled "The walking cure; an ergonomics of psychoanalysis".

A r t i s t s & W r i t e r s

Matthijs Gerber was born in the Netherlands and lives and works in Sydney. He lectures at Sydney College of the Arts and the University of Sydney. He exhibits regularly in Sydney and elsewhere.

Sean Kelly completed his M.F.A. at the Tasmanian School of Art in 1989 and has worked there as a tutor. His work has been exhibited in Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia.

Michael Narozny was born in Poland and is currently living in New York. He studied at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and has exhibited regularly in Melbourne and elsewhere since 1988.

Megan Walch graduated from the Tasmanian School of Art with Honours in 1989. She has participated in the Artists-in-Schools programme and the Art-in-Public-Buildings scheme in Tasmania and has exhibited in Hobart and Melbourne.

Alex Wanders completed his M.F.A. at the Tasmanian School of Art in 1988. Since then he has had several solo exhibitions in Tasmania, and his work was included in *Genius Loci: a Spirit of Place*, a touring survey of contemporary Tasmanian painting.

Artists & Writers



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