Learning by Observing

A paper written for the Byera Hadlee Undergraduate Travelling Scholarship by Mark J. Gerada, June 1994

Learning by Observing

Preface

This is a paper based on a programme that I originally set out for the Byera Hadlee Scholarship. The programme is essentially a programme of learning by 'doing'. I went on to explain that such a process of investigation involved collecting, analysing and breaking down elements in order to reassess and further exploit these elements as more understandable elements. For me this process happens through painting, as I believe that painting, on a surface level can make evident the pictorial principles which are applicable to all areas of design, creating a link between the fine arts and practical design. On a much deeper and more complex level, painting is a tool which facilitates the expression of the many ideas that I have; ideas that are often beyond explanation in any other terms. Painting develops my organizational skills, and aids in the development of a system of communication which will enable me to express my ideas more effectively and more clearly. I believe that what is most important is the power of the idea and its ability to point the way to the next steps forward. Painting, and its related process of analysis, is the starting point that becomes real and physical in other fields...especially in architecture.

Introduction (July 7, 1993)

This paper is a record of first hand experiences which covers the period of May 1993 to my planned return to Australia in early May 1994. It will take the form of exerpts from a written diary which was kept over this period, and particular subjects will undergo further analysis by way of the process of painting, putting into action the ideas that I developed in my 1992 dissertation titled *Painting to Theory and Teaching*[1]. This dissertation was about developing a process of observing my new surrounds, absorbing information, investigating the possibilities and articulating the resultant ideas as paintings. Brett Whitely summed up the relevance of the process when he said that "the most fundamental reason one paints is in order to see". Hence, this paper is a record of observing through my process of painting, and it is by no accident that many of the subjects in my paintings are architectural.

At this point it should also be pointed out that these observations will be of anything and everything that I find to be interesting, even if (at first) they do not seem to be relevant. The reason for this will become clearer later on, but for now it can just be said that the writings are about my experiences, my interests...whatever I am attracted to.

So, in a way, it is a personal search as well, and seeks to find a direction in my own work. It is not intended to be a 'finished' piece of writing, but a starting point for future work and research. It is a coming to grips with what I have seen, experienced and learnt so far. It is a realisation of "where I am at".

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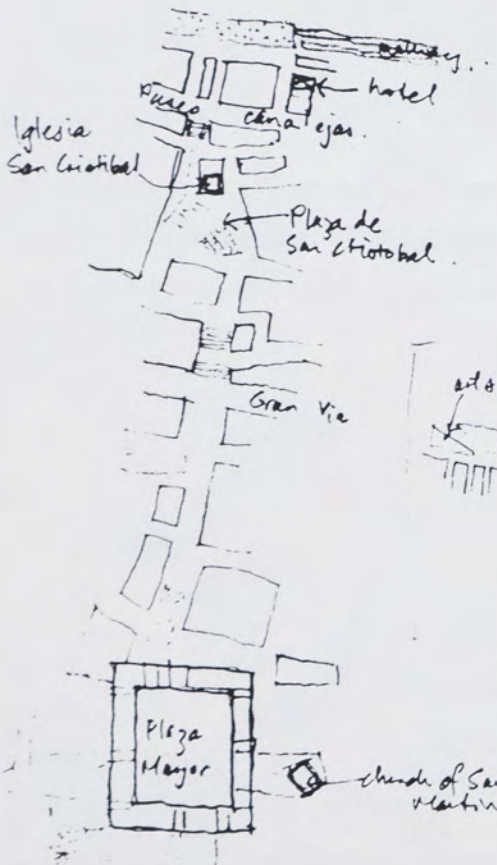
[1]*Painting to Theory and Teaching* traced the history of abstract painting in the early twentieth century, and in doing so, revealed the development of new ways of thinking. Special emphasis was placed on Wassily Kandinsky's quest to achieve a clear and logical system of communication to express his ideas. As the title suggests, the dissertation followed a process and how Kandinsky's explorations, although initially in painting, provide the basis on which many others, in all fields, can build.

3 5 93
plaza Mayor.

pavilion

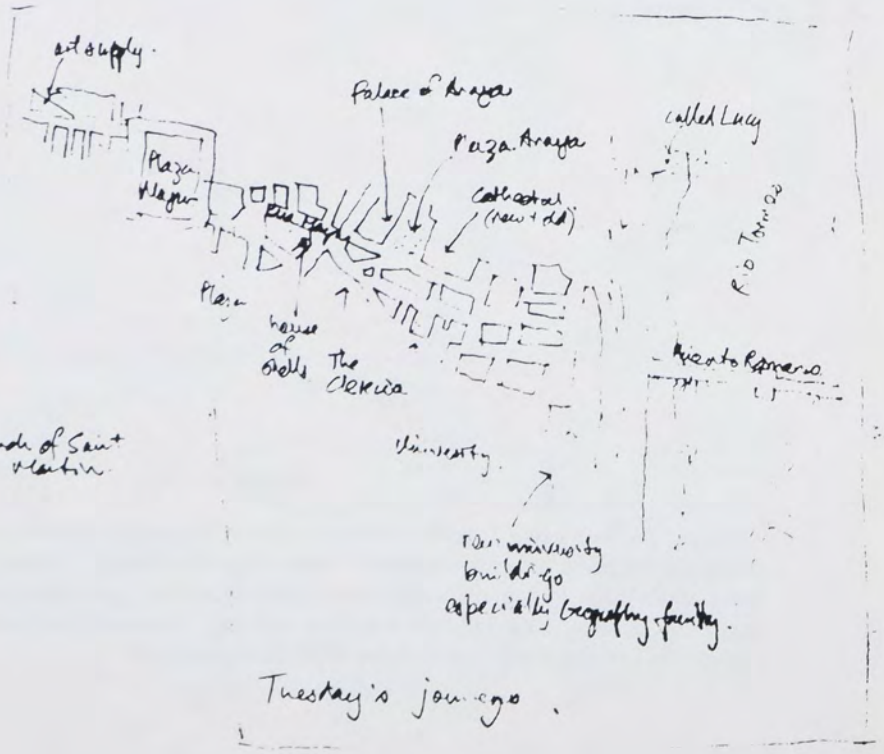
town hall.



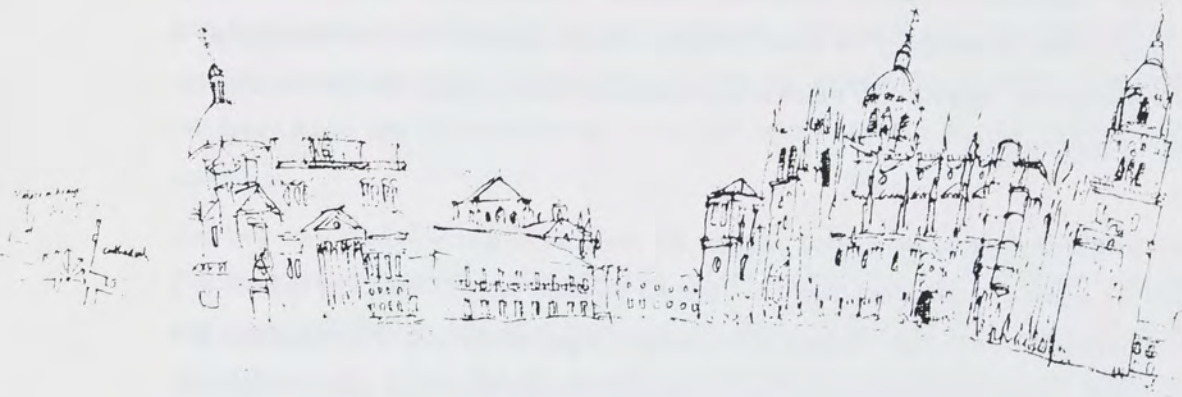
Monday afternoon walk

Plaza
de los
Ba.duc

plaza



Tuesday's journey.




Salamanca . 5.15 pm.

"flying over England"

The landscape

I am writing about the new landscapes that I am experiencing in order to come to grips with the landscapes which are most familiar to me, that is, the Australian landscape. I guess that that is one of the most important things about travelling, as you come to appreciate what you take for granted. That is one thing which I have tended to do in observing the landscape, especially those landscapes which are most foreign to me. And so far, my reactions have been to the landscape, and not to (pure) architecture. However, it should be noted that you hardly ever get a "natural landscape" in Europe, so maybe the term "landscape" should be broadened to include "urban scapes"...which is interesting in itself, as I tend to feel that many of the older European urban scapes tend to have undergone a relatively natural evolution, an evolution which is more in touch with the land. This will become the subject of many of my analysis.

Notions of the landscape from the air tend to abstract the situation in a very helpful way, and only further stresses the arguments that I developed in 1992 for my final design, titled The Growth of a Town, *at the University of Technology, Sydney. In this design I explored the idea of developing a new town, but in doing so I asked such questions as how do towns grow and how do we plan for this, and, most importantly, how do we respond to issues of the land (especially in relation to environmental issues). In undertaking this design project, I was very interested in how the Australian Aboriginals recognised the features of the land, and how this could lead to a reading of the "layers of the land". It also made me aware of the many mistakes that have been made in applying European planning attitudes to the Australian land.*

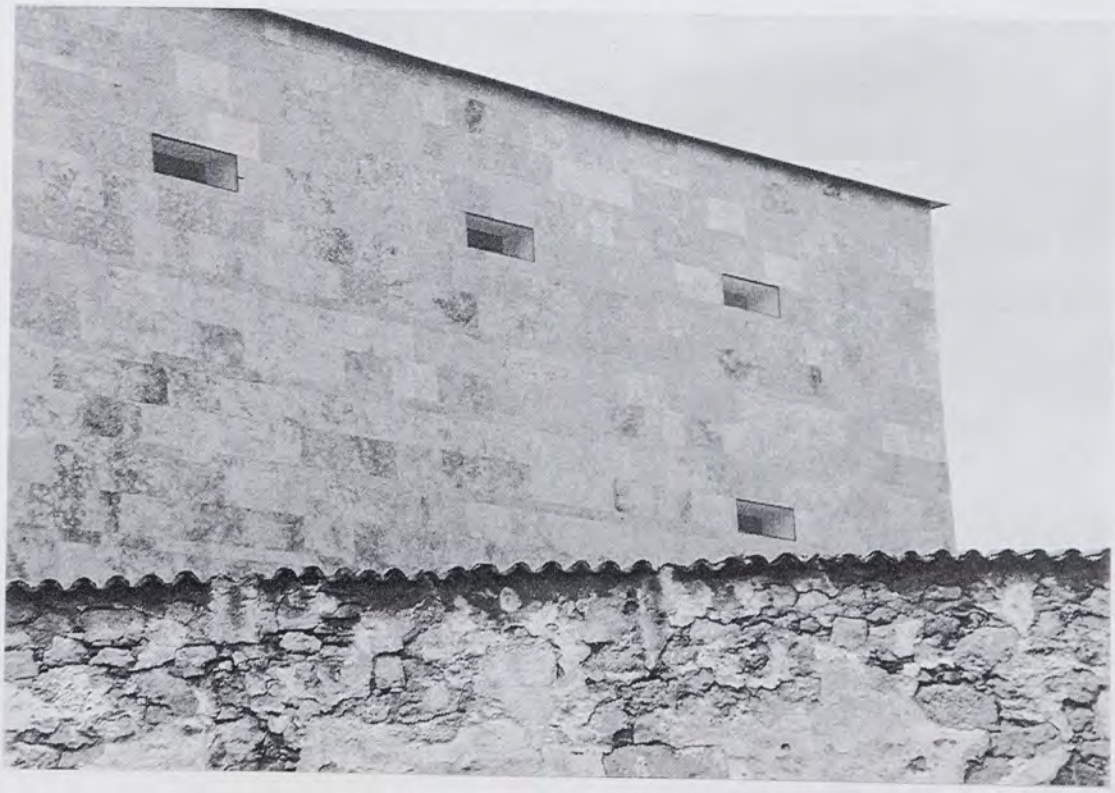
Salamanca (May 4, 1993)

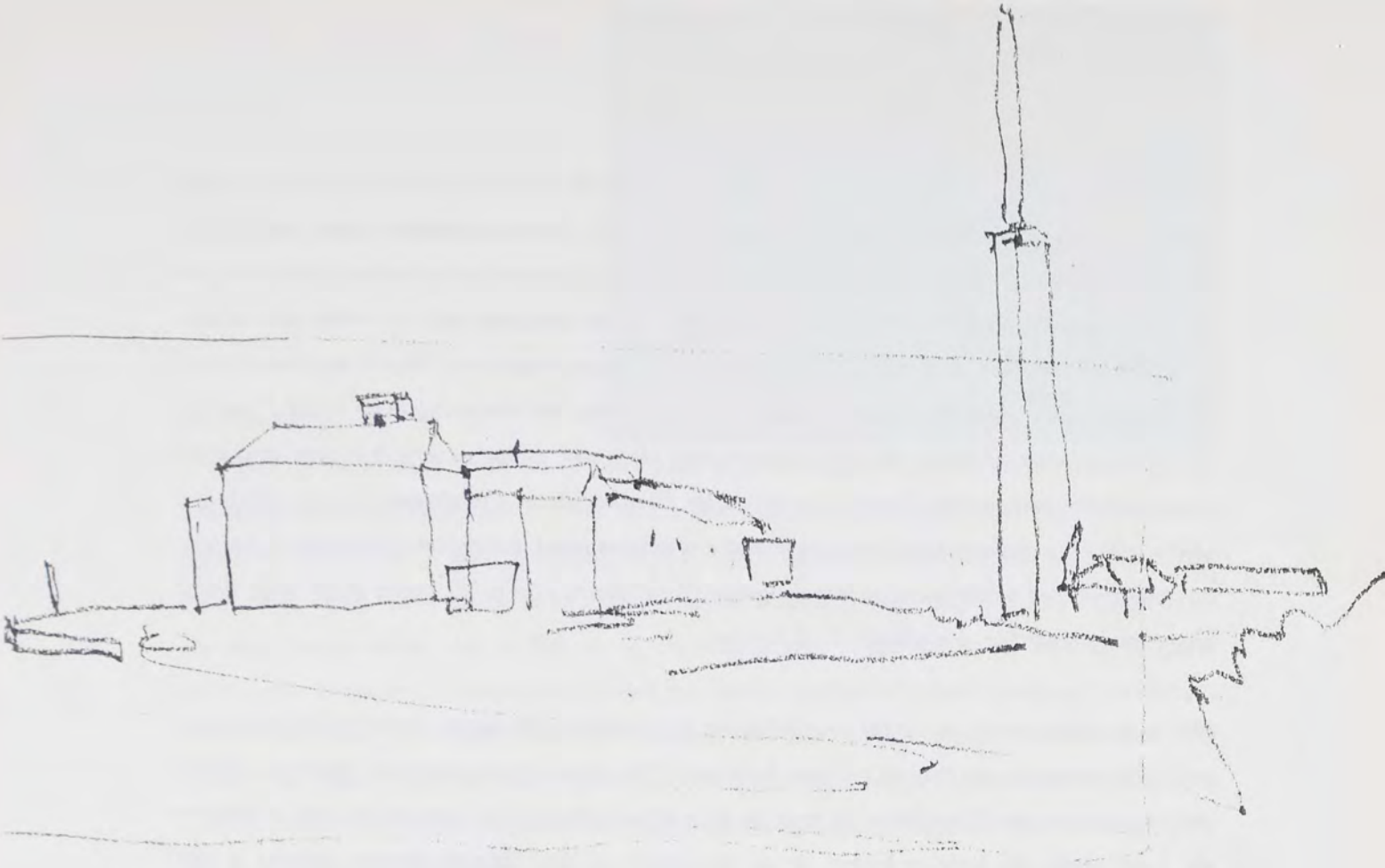
I need to walk into town today, so I walk out of my hotel, and head down the hill. I take a short-cut through a disused field, past the donkeys, and down by the village. I cross the roadway and commence my walk over Rio Tormes on Puente Romano, a bridge built by the Romans one thousand years ago! I find it hard to believe that I am walking on this bridge - to think that this is the oldest built structure that I have seen so far, and I am actually using it in the same way that it was originally intended. I eventually reach the other side, and I commence my climb into the old city, up along a ramp system that runs along the old city walls. As I walk through the system of narrow alleyways, glimpses of domes and towers are revealed, and eventually I am walking beside the almighty walls of Salamanca Cathedral, its bell tower too tall to comprehend. There is more activity now, especially

when I walk by Plaza Anaya, with its views opening up to the Palace and The Clerecia, where the university students are basking and chatting in the sun. The street gets narrow again, and by this stage it is literally buzzing with activity. The shops have just reopened after the siesta, the place has woken up, and the loud Spanish voices are bouncing off the sandstone walls on either side of Rua Maya. I continue along the newly paved street. I have to dodge people now. They do not seem to care and casually walk along in big groups, chatting and laughing and competing to be heard. I walk by the amazing House of Shells, through another small plaza with a loud canary in a cage on a third storey balcony, and past the Church of saint Martin. I notice that the church leans into the street, so I take a peek in to discover that every single wall and column leans in a different direction. I continue on into the arcade which opens up into the grand Plaza Mayor. I am at the centre of the town, and it seems (and sounds like) everybody else is here too.

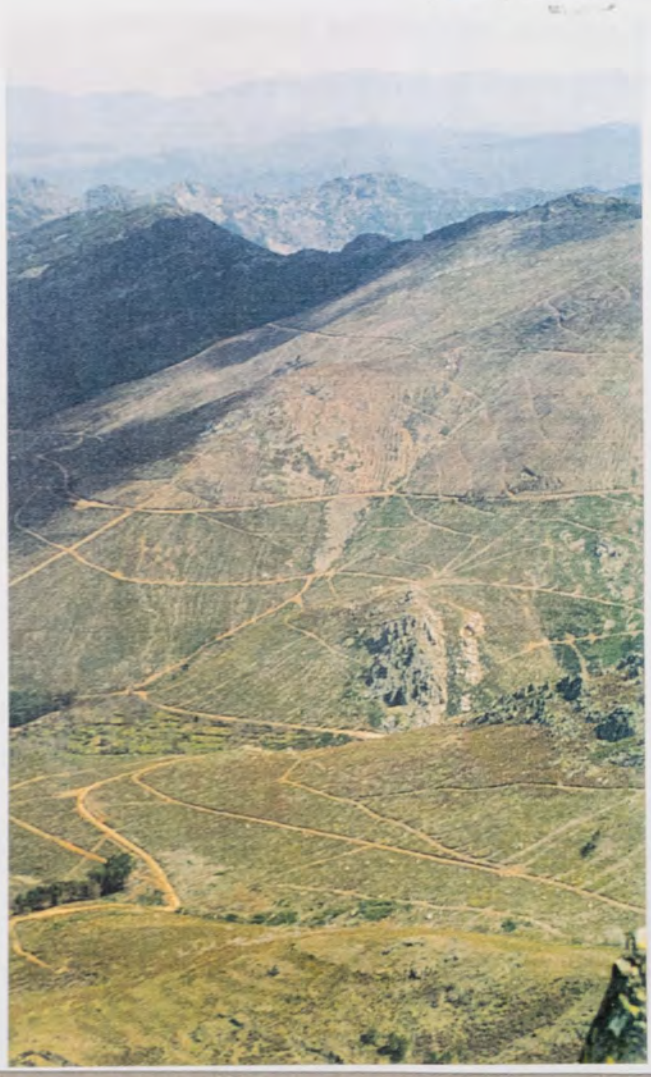
This is the public realm, this is the peoples' place. In Salamanca, the people live in small apartments with little balconies, and they do not have backyards. The people get dressed up in their best clothes, and they come to the Plaza Mayor to meet, to show off, to have fun, to laugh, to be loud, to listen to the brass bands and little orchestras, to eat ice cream and buy Spanish pastries covered in rich chocolate...

While I was in Salamanca, I also saw a lot of new architecture, most of which I was fascinated by, and could not believe how that buildings like this actually get built. There is such respect for architecture here. Maybe this has something to do with the fact that there is architecture all around them, and so the new architecture turns out well - it is a natural evolution, seemingly free of politics, where things "just happen". The skills have been passed down from generation to generation, using and crafting *the same materials in new and exciting ways. I feel that culture is reflected in the resulting architecture, and that there is a definite relationship between the people (the lifestyle) and the architecture. As an Australian I find all of this daunting.*





donkey tracks



detail of "Monastery at Pena de Francais"

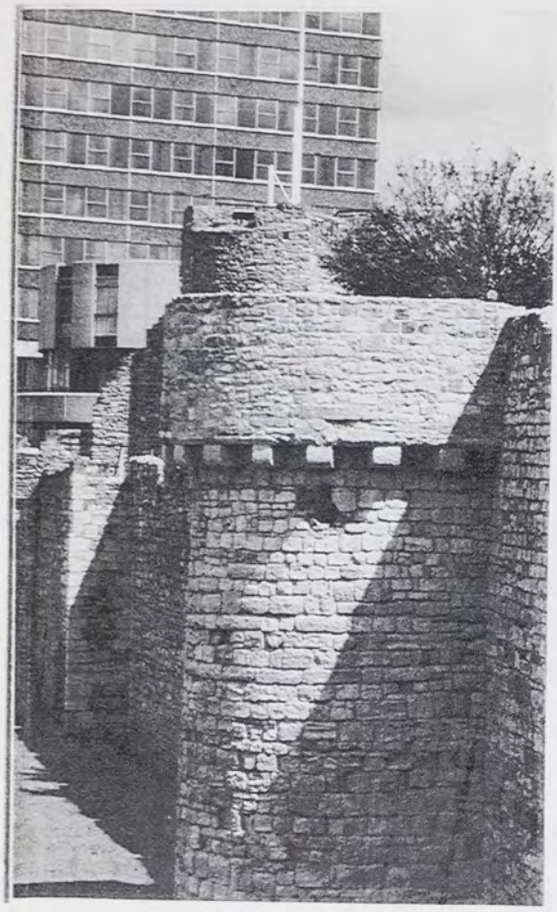
Pena de Francais, Spain (May 8, 1993)

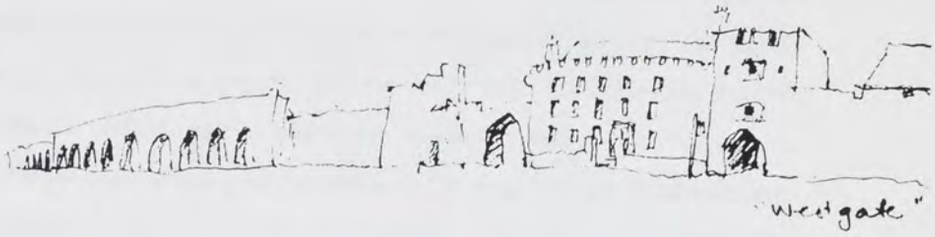
Today we drove up through the mountain villages, through the layers of the landscape. We drive through the farmlands, over clear running streams as the snow on mountain peaks melt under the summer sun, through more villages where old men guide their donkeys, through the woods and into monochromatic rocky slopes. We continue up the winding road until we finally reach our destination - the magnificent form of the monastery at the peak of the mountain. An amazing view is revealed below...the fields, the towns, and the winding donkey tracks which give the rolling forms of the landscape more definition (as the hills become more sculptural from the scratching and markings of the landscape). My first series of paintings while overseas concentrated on this marking of the landscape - whether it was conscious or not on the farmers behalf, it certainly made for an interesting subject.

The further I analysed the landscape, and the more I broke it down, the more legible the different planes became.

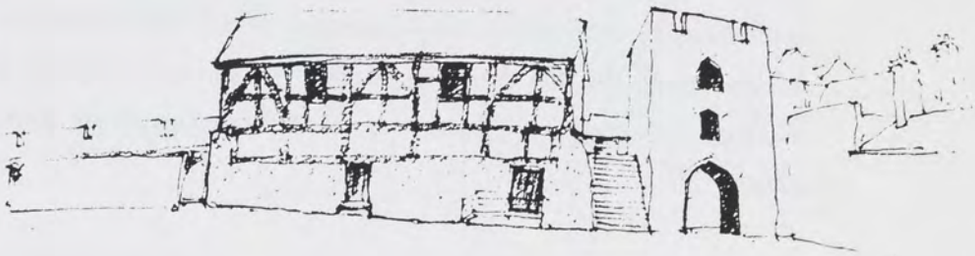
At this point I also note that every aspect of the landscape in European countries that I have visited so far is touched and worked by man. One hardly ever sees any part of the landscape that is completely natural, whereas, in Australia there are massive areas that are largely untouched (and hopefully it remains this way). Is it because Europeans have had less time *to "touch" land in Australia? Or could it be a proportional thing where in Europe you have a much smaller area of land to support a much larger number of people than in Australia?*

detail of "Landscape from Pena de Francais"

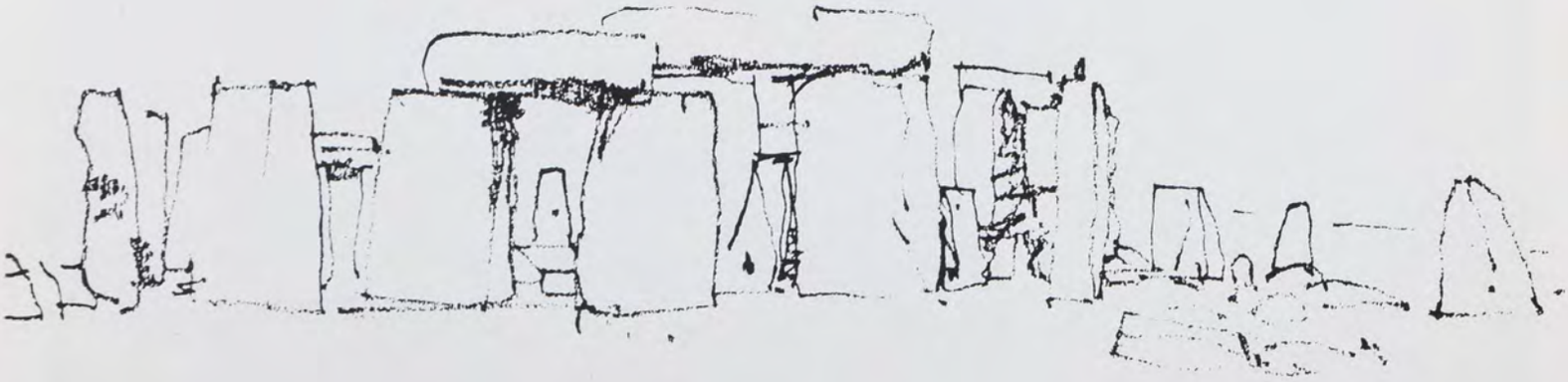




"Westgate"



Tudor Merchants Hall (1428)



"Storehouse

Southampton (May 17, 1993)

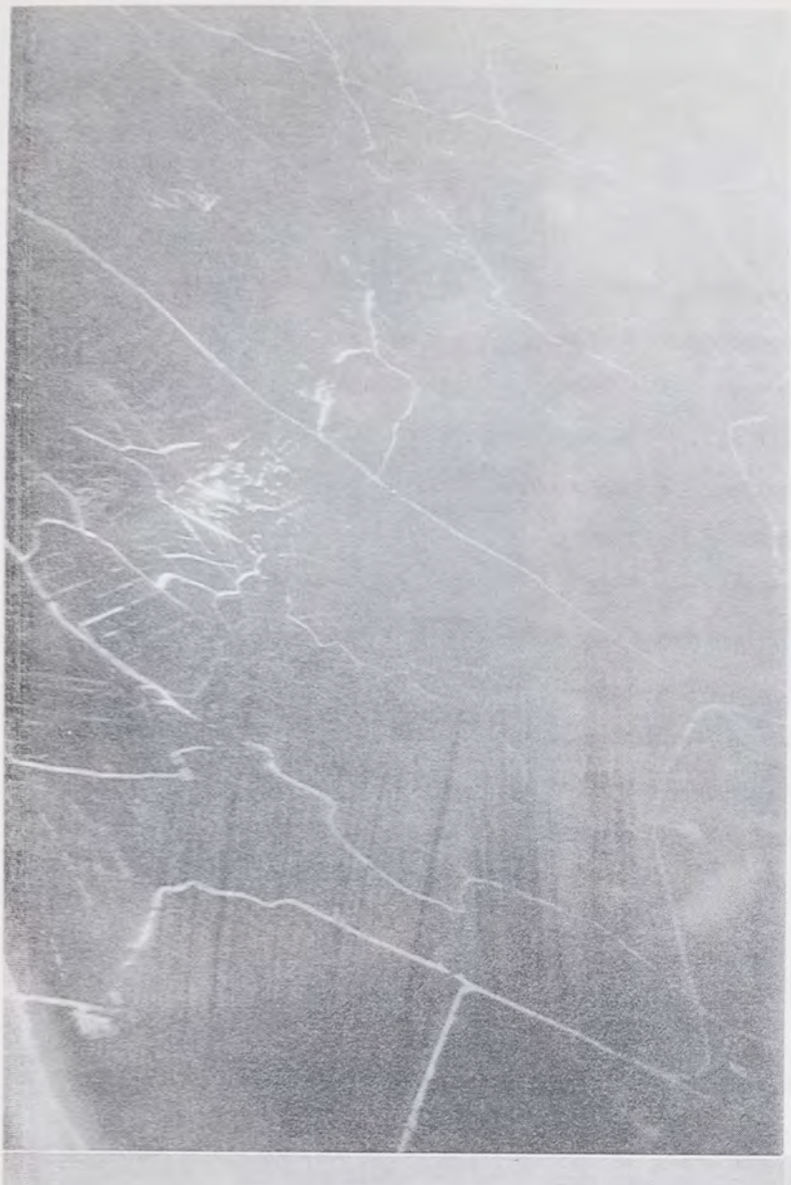
History really hit me again in this place. I saw the remains of buildings and walls that dated back hundreds and hundreds of years, and yet I could not understand how people could build a brutally modernist 1960's highrise beside and over 800 year old walls. "Where is the people's sense of respect", I asked. But then, on thinking about what architecture is really about, and how it arises out of people's real *needs for something, I realised that my dismay was not really necessary, and that this was really a reflection of the people's changing needs throughout history. This is also a reflection of me as an Australian - I am not used to seeing any permanent architecture not more than a hundred to a hundred and fifty years old, let alone thousands! If Australians find the remains of a building of slight historical significance it is immediately protected and treated as the most precious archaeological find (take the handling of the Governor Phillip development on Phillip Street in Sydney as an example, where the possible remains of the foundations of the first parliament house were discovered, excavated, covered in glass and consequently controlled the design of an entire high-rise development).*

Stonehenge (May 19,1993)

The recurring concept of history, and how new the idea of permanent architecture is in Australia, was only strengthened when I visited Stonehenge. The roads and fields go so close to Stonehenge as though it is a natural part of the landscape, as if it has always been there. Man throughout time has gone on and farmed, constructed roads, and carved up the landscape despite the prominence of this piece of architecture in history. I think that this really says something...this single piece of architecture was constantly hammered into us throughout our schooling as man's first attempt to make his mark, and when I was actually there to finally see the thing, I was more fascinated by the fact that it was so normal...the roads, the people, the fenced off areas. Stonehenge is set amongst a history of man's marking of the landscape.

In the end I was more attracted to the surrounding landscape (I imagine that people would have thought that it was strange that I was looking in the opposite direction)...those intense fields of yellow rape seed piercing the soft rolling fields of green sliced up by power lines. This, to me, is a better description of man's mark on the land, of man's constant attempt to control nature.

"Landscape near Stonehenge"



above Holland

above Spain

above England

About my painting (May 26, 1993)

While reading *Perfume*, by Patrick Suskind, on a second visit to Salamanca, I began to think that I am too young, or too inexperienced to have my own style. Maybe I should be "greedy" and devour things and suck them up. I should break things down and analyse them. I have plenty of time to develop my thoughts, my technique...and my style.

Holland (July 1, 1993)

On the way back from a trip to Denmark I flew over what I later discovered to be Holland. I could not help but notice thousands of shining lines on the landscape - it took me a while to realise that these lines were lines of water, and that these were Dutch dykes that were reflecting light up to me as the afternoon sun got lower. This patterning is a further example of man's attempt to control the land, or, in this case, to reclaim the land.

The town in the landscape (July, 1993)

As I fly over the countryside I am fascinated by the patchwork of fields. I read into the landscape - each colour, and each texture, denotes a different crop or a different use. I am reading the landscape in plan. The shapes and arrangements of the fields begin to say something of the various controls and limits on the land, whether it be rivers, woodlands, changes in terrain or unusable land. This pattern of fields then relates to the townships, townships that exist as tight little packages that do not take up any more land than they require. The towns are linked by a series of simple and effective transport systems. All of this begins to sound like my design proposal for The Growth of a Town *project (which I will talk about in more detail later on), or a futuristic urban design scheme. But, as I observed all of this from the air, I think of how these are actually systems that have been in operation for thousands of years. What better proof do we need? The clues for an effective handling of our environment have been laid out for us. They have been laid out since man started to work the land, yet we continue to carve up the land without any respect for it. So then, we must look to the advantages of these ways of organising the land, in the context of the modern world.*

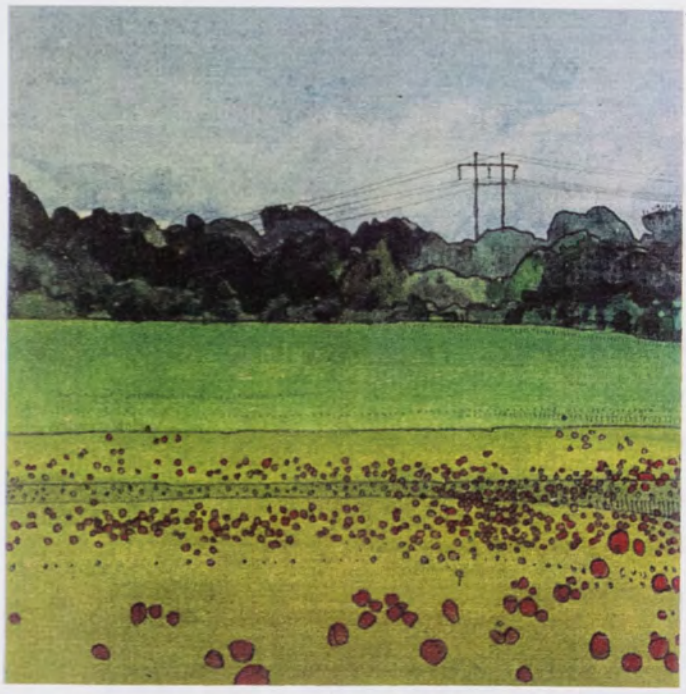
As I continue to fly over the European landscape, I imagine how different it would be if I were to be flying over the Australian landscape, and how much bigger the spaces would be. Incedentally, it is amazing the perception that Europeans have of Australia, as they believe that Australia is all big wide open spaces, and that the issue of dealing with the economic use of space is not an issue at all. The wide open spaces might be true to a certain extent, but I am not so sure about the latter belief, especially in relation to issues of environment and cost.

"Old homes at V. Skerninge"

1

"Fields near V. Skerninge"

2



3

"Landscape with Red Flowers"

4

"Landscape near Nyborg with windmills."

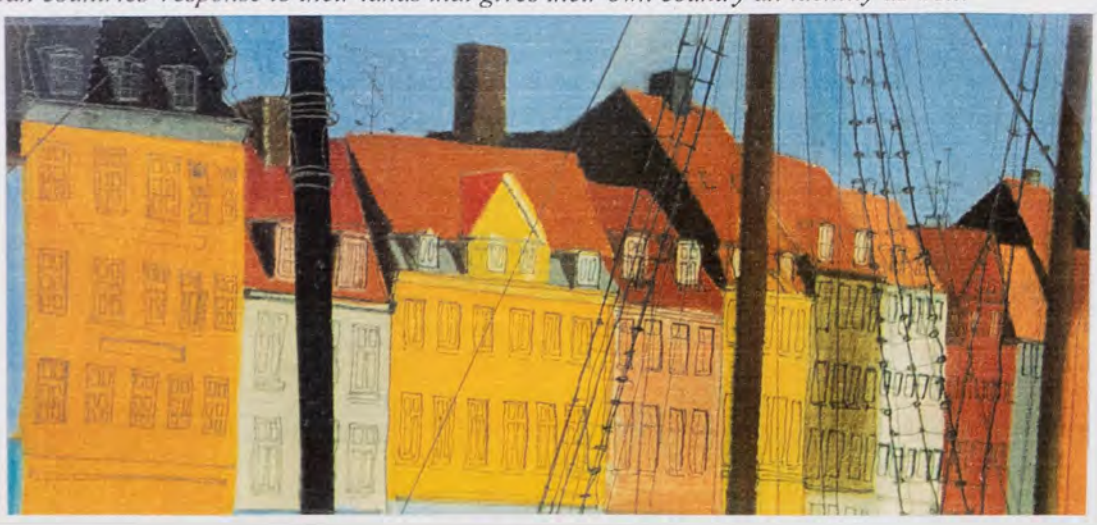
A sketch of a painting I did
in a dream lastnight

Denmark (July 9, 1993)

The thing that struck me most about the Danish landscape, both urban and rural, that differentiates it from any other, is the strong presence of the Danish flag. The associated rules with the flying of the flag only stresses the importance of the flag in Danish society. The true flag must never fly at night, and it must never touch the ground. In the countryside the flag takes on another form and another meaning. It is stretched out and becomes long and thin, acting as a type of windsock. This is called a "streamer", and gives a sense of the home. The rules become less stringent with the streamer, and it is allowed to fly day and night. (And even when I went to a four day music festival, I noted that all the tents had a Danish flag flying, and that people would carry the flags with them all of the time). As a country Denmark has the longest association with a flag as we know flags today. Hence the Danish flag is well established and there is no question as to whether it should be anything else or not...the Danish flag is the Danish flag. This represents the people's sense of pride in the flag and their country.

Another thing that really struck me while I was in Denmark (as an Australian) is how one country can be so close to another, or many other countries for that matter. To me, it is so strange to look across a body of water, and the land mass on the other side is that of another country (when I was at the Louisiana Modern Art Gallery in Denmark looking over the Oresund to Sweden). Or, to be at the train station in Copenhagen, and to be able to catch a train to Berlin. Or, better still, just to be able to drive to another country is an even "crazier" idea. All of this puts a totally different perspective on the world, and what defines countries and cultures. The more I think about it, the crazier it seems that a country like Australia, that is so physically detached from any other countries, so isolated, with such a distinctive and powerful landscape, is still apparently struggling to find its own identity.

At first I was thinking that the reason for this search for an identity comes back to the argument of time, and the very fact that Australia is so young. But the real fact is that Australia is not young, and that there is a very strong and identifiable culture that occurred before European Australian settlement which tends to be ignored (although things are slowly improving). The land is said to be the oldest in the world, so why isn't there more recognition of the Australian Aboriginal use and response to the land, which could very well become an integral part of Australia's identity (Aboriginals have the most experience with dealing with the land after all). In a sense, it is the European countries' response to their lands that gives their own country an identity as well.



The city (July 9, 1993)

I am beginning to conclude that it is the city *that does not respond to the land. It is the growing city and its related suburbs that "suck up" the land, and as a consequence, the environment is degraded (especially in the area of water run-off). It is the job of the urban designer to turn all of this around. We must come up with new ideas that take into account the background of the land as a way of pointing towards the future.*

From a letter to parents (July 11, 1993)

I am writing about all of the things that I find striking whilst on my travels, even if at first they seem non-relevant. In the end I think that it is these things that make a particular culture (and hence an architecture) so special, so individual, so much a part of a place. I will then be able to tie my photographs, sketches and paintings in with my written observations. The point is, is if these things were not so special in the first place, then I would not have been so moved to capture them. So I am using my painting as a type of test to guide my learning.

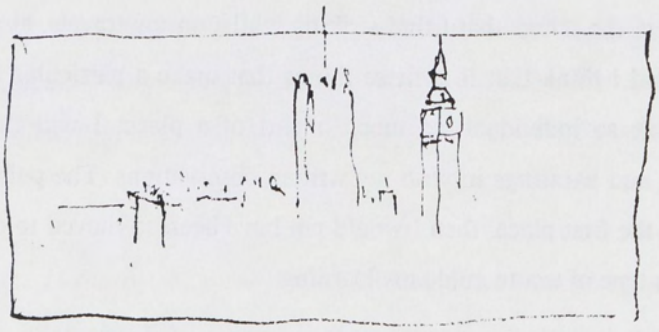
From a letter to a friend in Denmark (July 11, 1993)

...I feel satisfied as all of this exploration is finally starting to tie all of the different areas of my work in together.

Back to the Flag (July 13, 1993)

I thought that my interest in the flag was an interesting point in itself, especially in relation to me as an Australian away from his country for the first time, and in a time when Australia is searching for an identity through a new flag. On the one hand we have a country like Denmark, a country that has a strong idea of its culture, a country that is proud of its flag and its long history. Whereas, on the other hand, we have Australia, a country that is (apparently) very young, a country that is still searching for an identity (and if *there is an identity, the majority of its people are not aware of it - self awareness being the crucial factor in this area of identity), and a country that is now faced with throwing its flag away and is in search of a new one. It is also interesting that the Australia is up in arms as to what the new flag should look like (well, then again, the case might be that Australians don't mind [or care] what the flag looks like, or, if it should be changed at all, for that matter, which is an attitude which may well be the most accurate way of describing the Australian people...maybe this lack of identity is our identity...and bloody proud of it!).*

If the flag is supposed to be a symbolic representation of a country, then Australia has got some real thinking to do...but does it have to search? And, are the answers all there right in front of our eyes?



Westminster + Big Ben.

London (July 15, 1993)

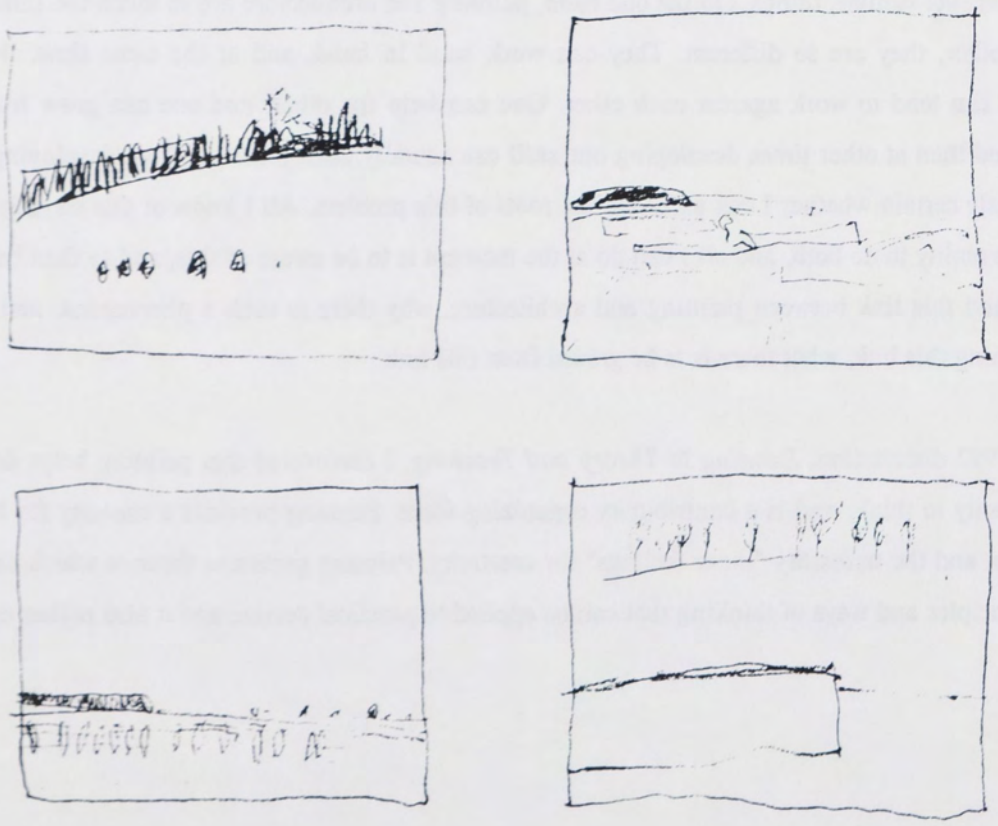
So far I have not been able to write about London. I put this down to the fact that I am actually 'living' here, and that it is difficult to isolate myself from the situation. But now I realise that, to me, it is the little differences in a place that makes the place special...

...Red busses, expensive Black Cabs, hardly any blue skies (and when there are not any clouds, the sky is not really blue at all), expensive food, expensive beer, low wages, an extreme passion for football (even though England keeps losing at an international level), lots of rain, shallow gutters on the side of the road (that allows one to drive forward into a parking spot), a red-orange traffic light before the green, mini-cabs with drivers that cannot drive in cars that fall apart, lots of theatre, a general lack of colour (especially in winter, when there is not the slightest hint of vegetation), differences in terminology, narrow roads, paper notes that are difficult to distinguish between, unarmed police, hot water radiators under all windows, pints and half pints instead of schooners and middies, the London Underground (or the "Tube"), no garbage bins in the Tube (which used to be potential I.R.A. targets), a general paranoia, signs everywhere warning you not to leave your bags unattended, security alerts, lever flushing toilets, pulling the chord in the bathroom in order to turn the light on, public houses being everywhere and being a big part of everybody's life...

Painting and architecture (July 16, 1993)

It is one thing to have the ablity to draw and paint, and to also be able to practice architecture. But it is another thing to be able to understand the link between the two. I mean, why do I do these two distinctive, yet similar, things. On the one hand, painting and architecture are so much the same, and on the other, they are so different. They can work hand in hand, and at the same time, the two abilities can tend to work against each other. One can help the other, and one can grow from the other, and then at other times developing one skill can actually deter the other from developing. It is not exactly certain whether I can ascertain the roots of this problem. All I know at this stage is that I have the ability to do both, and all I can do at the moment is to be aware of this, and to then begin to understand this link between painting and architecture, why there is such a phenomena, and, once establishing this link, what there is to be gained from this link.

In my 1992 dissertation, *Painting to Theory and Teaching*, I discovered that painting helps develop the capacity to think, and is a contributory organizing force. Painting provides a capacity for logical thoughts, and the necessary "inner feelings" for creativity. Painting generates theories which develop into principles and ways of thinking that can be applied to practical design, and it also makes evident



pictorial principles which are applicable to other areas of design, especially architecture. As Wassily Kandinsky said, designers theorize in the "style of the painter, that is to say, artistically".[2]

So getting back to the uncertainty about painting and architecture, it is important for me to be aware of the ideas that I develop through painting, and the things that painting helps me to see. All of this must certainly help me to understand and read architecture, and it must also go a long way in developing my organising and creative skills in terms of making buildings and making places.

Reflecting on the format of this paper

What I am doing here is simply putting all of these little bits and pieces of thoughts together - in their raw form - and this will tell the story of my process of discovery. *Process* is the most important part of learning. The ability to express this process (which can be very difficult, because this actually means that one is aware of the way they learnt something, or, exactly how one came to make a conclusion), is just as important. It is vital in the course of education.

This is my process...the photography...the sketching...the recording...the painting...the re-painting...writing all about this...and then breaking all of this down and organising it so that it is clear and easier to communicate. As I discovered in *Painting to Theory and Teaching*, the manipulation of information is necessary in any field. In most cases, for information to be useful, it is initially kept to a highly abstracted level, so that what was complex information can now be translated into directly, and more readily understandable, perceptual patterns. Therefore, by eliminating the specifics it is intended that the user will concentrate on the few facts that matter.

On a bus approaching Dover (July 28, 1993)

This is another facet of the process. I want to collect visions, framed visions. I want to store them and organise them in my memory. Just looking and taking things in, not necessarily choosing good from bad, but taking them all in. One day I will be able to draw on everything and use it all...as created visions...as paintings and as buildings.

The aim at this stage is not to be selective, and not to go out of my way to see something in particular. The most special and useful things are likely to be somewhere where you least expect it, in everyday life. This is reinforced by the attitude that art education must have its foundations in life. It must be adopted from the requirements of life.[3]

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[2] Kandinsky, W., THE BARE WALL, from the journal *Der Kunstnarr*, No. 1, April 1939, cited in Wingler, H. M., BAUHAUS, Massacheusetts Institute of Technology, 1962, p. 155.

[3] von Bode, W., THE TASKS OF EDUCATION AFTER THE WAR, from the journal *Die Woch*, Vol 18, No. 14, p. 469, cited by Wingler, H. M., op. cit., p. 24.

"Dover 1"

"Dover 2"

"Dover 3"

In attempting to capture these visions, or observations, it is quite likely that the time will be limited. But, quite often, this can have its advantages, because, in doing this one only has the time to capture the essence of the subject, what is most important, and in the end, what is most necessary in order to make the final vision most striking. This is the process of abstraction, that process of eliminating the specifics (that I mentioned earlier) so that the viewer concentrates on the few facts that matter, hence effecting the viewer in the most direct way possible. This is communication.

I look out of the bus window...the rolling hills, the layering of the land - it is simplified, screened, abstracted by the fog at dusk. The fog does not blind, it only intensifies. It makes visible the most basic structure of the landscape.

On this journey from London towards Dover, I realised that the majority of the English public housing projects of the Fifties has really had a bad effect on the visual environment. Sure, extensive rebuilding had to take place after the destruction of bombing during the Second World War, but this should not have been seen as an opportunity to carry out 'dreams' driven' by the then current aesthetic trends. Traditionally architecture had a character and served a function other than an architect's egotistical dream. The architecture of the Fifties, however, is merely a reflection of what was seen as a Utopian world - an unimaginative transformation of two dimensional plans into dirty three dimensional forms, a misdirected following of the modernist religion.

Now I am observing the mass of the up-lit castle sitting strongly on the curve of the black hill against an angry sky...zoom...what happened, where did it go, no time for the castle any more, through the valley now. The winding country road has become a flyover, we are mid-air and...BLAM!...Dover suddenly appears below as a town set against tall white cliffs. The hundreds of flood lights makes the foggy air orange. A dynamic process of queuing vehicles, of cargo, of people, moving in and out and over each other, on and off ferries, the panic of producing passports. I am going to another country!

Travelling up through Belgium, Holland and Germany (July 29, 1993)

The cities are so compact. Buildings are all ten to fifteen stories, except for a few central office blocks. What I find most striking is that the fields and pastures start only minutes from the city centres. The whole concept of space is so different over here.

The most obvious thing to comment about in Amsterdam is the dyke and canal systems. In the rural areas the dykes seem to set up a system of boundaries, defining the edges of properties and fields. I observed a plan of the city centre, a system of radiating canals overlayed by a radiating road system. It as though the canals are of primary importance, and the roads only secondary. Also, I saw a new

"Weeds south of Vejle Harbour"

"3 streamers"

type of building that I had never thought of before. I would call it "Weir Architecture", a building at a point where the water level changes in the canals. Some are as simple as gates, others are more elaborate and take on a built form.

Autobahns, Germany (July 29, 1993)

Over the last couple of decades a new type of town has emerged. This is the freeway rest area, (which replaces the traditional town which has been by-passed) where one can diverge off the freeway for a short break, and seeing that one is not allowed to do a U-turn on a freeway, there is usually an identical rest area located on the other side of the freeway for drivers heading in the opposite direction. But on the Autobahns, I noticed something that I had never seen anywhere else before - the rest area as a bridge. This means that only one building is required, and that the building itself links both directions of the autobahn. To me, this opened up a another area of architecture - bridge architecture, *or the building as a bridge.*

Vejle, Denmark (July 30, 1993)

My initial response was that there was nothing in this place worthy of observing. But (like in most cases), the more time I spent "living" and doing normal things, and not trying *to observe, the more I realised how special the place was and how much there was to be learnt. Vejle is essentially an industrial town and is set on a harbour which is an extension of Vejle Fjord. A tall and slender freeway flies over the fjord, remaining at the same height as the top of the wooded hills on either side of the fjord, "blasting" out of one side and disappearing into the other. This is such a bold statement. It is simply a bypass. Yet it is a strong challenger to nature. Man has overcome the obstruction of water by constructing a freeway hundreds of metres above the water's surface. Despite this, its shear simplicity does not pose an eye sore - it is so strikingly different to the natural features of the landscape that it sits as a separate element in the composition. The flyover simply does what it has to do.*

I was attracted to the outer areas of the town where I observed dwellings of a much smaller scale. Properties are defined by hedges and there is a layering of brightly and individually coloured dwellings down the hill sides that define the the edge of the town. In one particular painting I wanted to capture the layering of the landscape from the tree canopies, houses, power lines, roads, fences, and then the verticals of the tall straight tree trunks and the flag posts.

In a conversation with a Dane, I discovered that humour is related to culture, and that humour is very much to do with irony. My inability to communicate verbally is therefore not only limited because of my insufficient knowledge of the Danish language, but also because of a limited feeling

"Liobets's Room"

"Kupert agerland ved Lejre"

for details of the way the culture works. So even if I am able to speak to a person, when it comes to something more intimate like expressing something ironically, it does not necessarily have the desired effect (and some cultures, say German, very rarely use irony at all). This makes me realise how intricate communication is. Even with painting and architecture, so many of the tools that we may use in order to achieve a desired effect are deeply rooted in culture, which is quite often taken for granted. I have to be even more aware of this when it comes to painting, as the tools of communication become more and more personal.

Observations about Denmark (August 3, 1993)

A great deal of attention is paid to the landscaping of public open space. It is done very skilfully and competently for all levels of spacial type. I had to ask myself why this sort of thing cannot be done in Australia - the ideas may be there, but they hardly ever get carried out, and budgets for urban projects and landscaping are more than always reduced, and sometimes dropped altogether. But then I discovered that this extensive landscaping has proven to be a contentious issue in Denmark. I discovered that services that can be taken for granted in Australia are difficult to come by in Denmark. Child care is very expensive and difficult to come by, the number of homeless continues to rise, the cost of living is frighteningly high (I treated the prices as a bit of a novelty), and, to my shock, everyone pays a minimum of 50% tax, even if they are on welfare benefits!

In Denmark, all primary and secondary roads feature a bike track (noting that the use of bicycles is very popular in Denmark), and all pedestrian paths and cycleways have the same format. The pedestrian paths are always made up of a row of granite blocks, then a concrete paver (about 400 x 400mm), a granite block, and then another concrete paver. If there is a cycleway (noting that this is also used by small motorbikes), the path and the cycleway are separated by three rows of granite block, the cycleway is of bitumen, then there is a granite block gutter (a change in level), and then the roadway. This format is used all around the country. This stresses the importance of working with the one format, because it makes things so legible. In fact, most paving for other urban spaces uses the same palette of materials - concrete pavers articulated by granite blocks. This not only makes the reading of the place easier (once I knew how this pedestrian and cycleway system operated, no further explanation was necessary when I came across similar situations), but it also gives a place an identity.

The notion of identification also extends to the strong use of colour. Throughout Denmark (and by this stage I have been in cities, industrial towns, farm areas, woodlands and coastal regions) I have noted the continual use of boldly coloured limewashes, a yellow ochre being the most prominent. This is used for houses, barns, retail and commercial. The use of yellow is followed by warm ochres (from brown to red), and then a dark blue green colour. In a traditional sense, say with barn houses, colour

Use of colour render to define spaces

Gardening plots on the edge of town

is used to heighten the articulation of surfaces. Timber frames are generally washed in red ochre, and the masonry infill in yellow.

Colour strengthens the urban form as well. With the intricate system of streets, malls, archways and small squares that are found in the towns, the use of strong colour articulates the planes, forms and spaces. It also heightens the journey, or the experience, as one moves through the spaces, especially when each passage way, and each square, is a different colour. So not only does the town have an identity, but each space within it does aswell.

In Danish cities and towns, most people live in high density housing blocks. These housing blocks usually have beautifully landscaped open spaces, but these spaces are predominantly public. On the edge of the towns there exists small garden plots, and hence providing the opportunity for the people to own a plot of land to fulfil their need to do some gardening. Each plot, usually about 7 metres x 20 metres, is used to grow fruit and vegetables, plants, flowers, or to generally "plod around". Each plot has its own brightly coloured shed (some being a little larger than the average tool shed, as the owners are allowed to stay on the plot, but not on a permanent basis), and of course, being Denmark, each plot has its own flag pole and proudly flying Danish flag.

As a non-Danish speaking Australian of Mediterranean origins, I am viewed as some sort of a spectacle. I never thought that I would find myself in such a situation. I will never forget my experiences on August 1 where I had just walked down through a thickly wooded valley, by an old mill that had been converted into a hotel, and up the other side of the valley into the small village of Grejs. I needed a drink, but seeing that it was a Sunday afternoon, no shops were opened, so I followed the distant noises of human activity. As I walked between green fields and by brightly coloured farm buildings, the source of the noise became visible. It was a football match. I headed straight towards a small tent where, by now, most of the people had gathered. I walked into the tent, stumbled with words and somehow communicated what it was that I wanted, and as I turned around, I could not help but notice that everyone had stopped talking and were staring at me. I was the only person with blach hair and a dark complexion, and obviously the only non-Dane - this was the first time that I was consciously an alien. Here I was, in a tiny dark tent near a tiny village in the middle of a foreign country - this would be as deep as I would get into the depths of Denmark, and I would never feel as far away from home as I did on this occasion.

And these things make me realise how much there is to be learnt by travelling, and by being away from home. You learn so much simply by being away from the things that you take for granted, and by seeing how other people live their lives and go about what they consider as normal.

"Swansea"

Swansea, Wales (August 8, 1993)

Swansea is Wales' second largest city (after Cardiff, the capital), and is an industrial waterfront city sitting between the sea's edge and steep hills. My first real view of this town was out of my hotel window, across a sea of grey-brown terrace roofs, chimneys and television antennae to rows and rows of the same climbing up the hills to the rear of the town. I realised that I was in a very working class town.

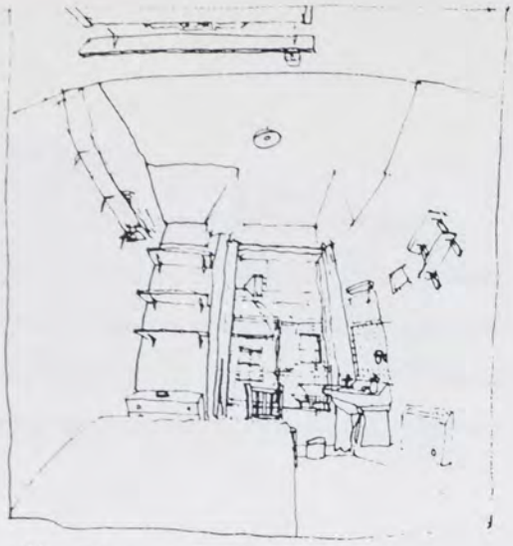
Later on, I walked through the residential areas, I was overcome by a sense of comfort, a sense that the people who lived here were comfortable, and proud of their small territory that they could call home. And despite this sense of 'comfiness', the streets are hard, dull and claustrophobic. There is not any sight of anything green or soft, whether it be a tree or grass. Even the vista through to the rolling hills beyond the canyon is hard as the rows of terraces climb up the steep slope of the hill. And still I feel comfortable as I walk past the groups of old women talking (I had to think twice as to whether they were actually speaking English or not!), only adding to the feeling that I am in one of the most friendly and welcoming places that I have visited yet.

At night time I drink with the contractors who are working on an enormous new bridge and flyover system. I discover that they have travelled from all over Britain to work here. They are all working away from their families, struggling to make money, and struggling to keep their jobs. They are working long hours (otherwise it is not worth working at all, as the rates are so low), and are working without unions and insurance in very dangerous conditions (that they are all too aware of). If they go on strike, they will simply lose there jobs - at the back of their minds are the millions who are even less fortunate than they are, the millions that are without work who would work under any conditions to earn some money. And to think that they are risking their lives working on a bridge that hardly seems justifiable. The motorway is crossing nothing but a mud flat, meaning that no ships, let alone boats, will be going under the bridge. This raises the question of why the bridge that has already claimed lives and seriously injured others has to be so tall. Nevertheless, the contractors are not complaining.

When you talk to the locals you get in there "amongst the thick of things", and you find out what a place is really about. You experience things and other people's lives much more realistically through the eyes of the locals.

Mumbles, Wales (August 9, 1993)

We catch a bus through some of the more beautiful areas of Swansea, along the coast to a little seaside village called Mumbles. This is a little town comprising of a string of "cute" buildings along a promenade sandwiched between the foot of a steep thickly vegetated hill and a beach. The old



'My room - Terby'

'Terby Harbour'

Fairlands South West of Castle Beach

buildings view back over the sea to where we were only half an hour ago. The tide was very low, it may very well have been possible to walk in a straight line on the sand flats across the bay to Swansea, which, from this distance, only the industry and power stations were visible against the rolling Welsh hills. The low tide left many small boats sitting on the sand flats - this inspires me - the boats are like dabs of bright paint on a sandy coloured canvas. There is a castle ruin that proudly looks over the whole scene.

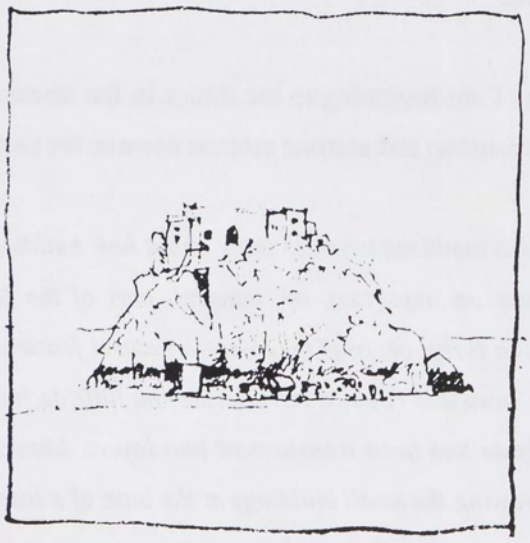
On this day I realise that I am beginning to see things in the landscapes as paintings. My mind is starting to automatically translate and abstract subjects down to the bare essentials.

Swansea and Mumbles also made me begin to think about how buildings sit in and on the landscape, and how they can become an important, or, integral, part of the landscape. It is as though the buildings have always been there, or, as if they were a natural feature of the landscape. At Swansea, when I was drawing the rows and rows of terraces on the hillside just beyond the city, I started to think about how the hillside had been transformed into layers. Mumbles then made me think about this notion when I was drawing the small buildings at the base of a lush hill, and then when I drew the magnificent castle up on the best, and most obvious, vantage point in the region.

Tenby, Wales - an exert from letter to parents (August 10, 1993)

On arrival in the town of Tenby, about two hours west of Swansea by rail, I could not work out what was so special about this place, or why so many people had recommended it to me. We quickly found a hotel. The room was up in the attic...it was small and bright. Out of the window I could see the pale blue walls and slate shingled roof of a similar building not very far across the road. Through my open window rose up the strong accents of the Welsh children screaming, laughing and playing below, along with the sounds of the seagulls, the cool sea breeze, and the fleeting summer light which flowed into the space between these four glowing walls - and I felt as though I could live here and paint here. My spirits were raised, and I was already starting to get a feel for Tenby before I had even seen it.

Later that afternoon I ventured out, wandering through the maze of narrow streets, beautiful old buildings and the old city walls. And then it all opened up to one of the most breathtaking views I had ever seen. The land dropped away dramatically down to the beach below and the calm turquoise waters dotted with colourful little sailing boats and buoys. On venturing further around the edge of the land, winding in and out of the streets which opened up and screened different views of the sea, I was confronted with yet another spectacular view - another beach (Castle Beach), this one featuring an island with a castle on top of it, a distant island that stretched across most of the horizon, and a headland to the right. This headland is the epitome of soft rolling hills, covered in a patchwork of green pastures glowing under the warm late afternoon sunlight. This softness drops quite abruptly



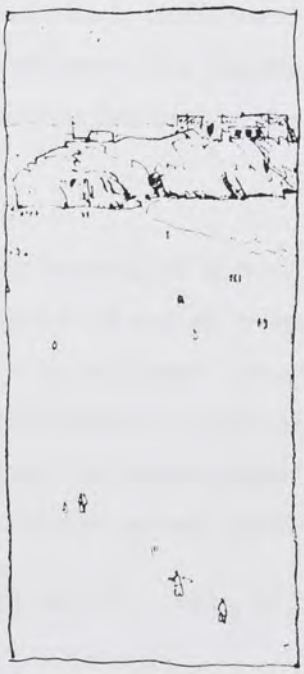
"Castle Beach"

into the sea, the soft becomes hard and breaks down into headlands and juts back out of the sea as islands, providing the vantage points for the castles, lighthouses and a monastery.

The notion of the built form in the landscape was only strengthened at Tenby. At Castle Beach, the central headland is fronted by an island, presumably once part of the headland, topped by the castle, a strong form which grows out of the large rock. The houses and hotels grow similarly out of the cliffs of the mainland, turning rock face into embankments, blade walls, then, finally into built forms. It is this transition from the natural form into the built form that especially interests me.

Once again I am absolutely amazed by the old city walls, but this time the walls take on a different format. The city is walled only on three sides, the fourth side being naturally fortified by the land dropping off to the sea below. The town has since developed , both within, and beyond the city walls. Now it seems as though the walls cut through the maze of narrow streets.

I sat observing, drawing, and then slowly walked about just getting a feel for the place. I decided at this point that this place was incredible, and, being so satisfied, that we would stay here for the rest of our time here in Wales. I began to think about my earlier disappointments on arrival, but now, after experiencing the rest of the town, it only makes more sense. It makes me realise something - I am so used to the idea that the railway is the centre of the town, that is, you have a railway line and stations are pin-pointed along this line and towns start to grow from these points. So, I had thought that the train had brought me to the middle of Tenby, because, from what I know as an Australian, seeing that most towns have developed since the evolution of the train, the train station is usually at the centre of the town. I thought that I had arrived in the middle of a dump, when in real fact I had come to the back *of the town. This town had been created hundreds, even thousands, of years before the idea of rail had been thought of. This town was created from the landscape - it not only opened up to the views, but it was strategic in that the rugged coast provided protection against enemies.*



Caldey Beach - South Beach"

Tenby Castle - Castle Beach"

"Big Ben - Houses of Parliament"

"Roof of Westminster Abbey from Victoria Tower Gardens"

Back in London (August 15, 1993)

At first I wondered why we never learnt about these things at university, these simple and most basic commonsense things that have, in these cases, been around for hundreds of years. But then I realised that the best way to learn these things is to experience them first hand, to be there, to see them, to feel them, to be in them.

The fact that my camera had broken in Wales also opened my eyes up to something. This place was so beautiful, so I was forced to capture it and record by way of drawing. Because of time limitations, and the numerous views that I wanted to capture, I captured the true essence of the place (whereas, if I did have my camera, I would have lazily "snapped" away without giving as much a thought to what it was that I was actually recording).

This is a special period of learning; a period of learning for myself. At the moment, I am thinking that at university we "learnt how to learn". That is, we learnt the basics, the foundations, the starting points (besides, with education, it is not a matter of "what" is being taught, but rather "how" it is being taught[4]). Education becomes a bringing out and developing of inherent gifts through a process of free activity and self learning. Now I am learning for myself, which will lead to a richer and deeper knowledge and ability (it is one thing to have knowledge, but it is another thing to be able to apply this knowledge).

It is also important to find a niche. This could be better described as discovering what one is especially good at, and more importantly, how one can best express his or her talents. So, it can also be said that it is one thing to have talents, or the above mentioned knowledge for that matter, but to be *aware* of these talents, and to be able to put these abilities to use, is another thing.

This is another positive thing about self learning time, because the process of self awareness can take time. This time spent doing "nothing" is much more important than others, and even I, would seem to think right now! And maybe this "nothing" time is really a very "fruitful" time, where I am stopping and reassessing in order to recollect my thoughts. It is a time of breaking free from limitations so that I will have a better idea of what direction to take.

It is also quite possible that it is only when one is so withdrawn from "normal everyday life" that you can actually achieve things like this. In that "normal everyday life" it could be so easy to do the "normal" things, to get a "normal job" (whatever that may be), and to see "normal people". Away from home I am forced to see different things, and forced to think about alternatives. I might see something that I may never have thought of, and I am forced to ask myself why that something might be the way it is. Even in terms of employment, I have had to think about alternatives, as employment,

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[4] Kandinsky, W., cited by Wingler, H.M., op. cit., p. 147.

"Fields near Vejle."

"Vejle Ådal"

especially in the architectural field, is virtually impossible in London at the moment (and I know that I will gain from these alternative types of work and having to think so independently).

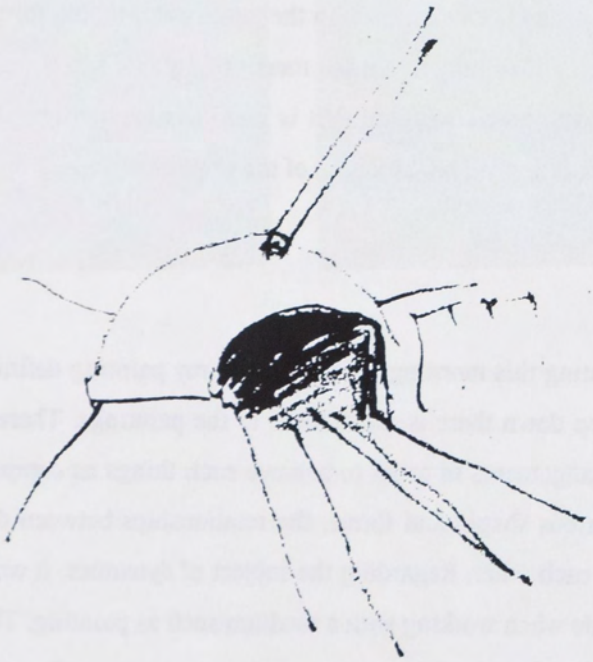
It is funny though, because on the other hand, this time has also given me the time to learn "normal" things, and when I say normal things this time, I mean the absolute basics - the time to think, the time to observe (even watching a bird wash and clean and tidy itself makes me think how us humans often become too complex), learning how to housekeep, how to shop, how to wash and iron clothes, how to cook, and so on. With this in mind I think of how art education should have its "foundations in life". (I also think of how I never had the time to do a lot of these thongs before because of the chaotic life of university, work and trying to survive - and this was supposed to be an education?)

About my painting (September 1, 1993)

I like the way my painting is developing a certain "whimsy" about it. I think that it is this quality that gives it an "economy of communication". A flower can still evoke the feelings of a flower, and possibly more, if has been diffused into a series of lines. This has been something that I have discovered while working on a series of larger paintings of Danish fields. As an exercise, these were based on calender posters of fields that I had personally experienced, and the aim was to communicate the field to the viewer in a more direct way. By going through this process of abstraction, I aimed to express much more than what had been expressed in the pure photographic form. This is a process of breaking things down, breaking them down into the most primitive of structures. This is like looking at a subject through a microscope, removing all that is unnecessary, and only taking those elements which are vital in the making of the overall structure of the organism. This is my way of abstraction.

September 18, 1993

On reflecting about my painting this morning, I decided that my painting definitely is whimsical, but only on a surface level. Deep down there is much more to the paintings. There is a hidden world of complexity, of scientific arrangements in order to achieve such things as composition and dynamics, of relationships between various shapes and forms, the relationships between different colours - and how all of these relate with each other. Regarding the subject of dynamics, it would be much easier to create something that is static when working with a medium such as painting. The real challenge is to create, or to *imply*, movement - to take from nature, or from my surrounds, and then to portray in a single instant all the things that we would normally have more time to see. I am developing the ability to take things and to manipulate them in order to communicate as much as possible in that flash instant, in that one singular painted image.



The tender

Canary Wharf, London (September 10, 1993)

I really do not have a lot to say about this as I promised myself that I would only write about those things that I find inspiring. To be honest, all I did at this place was shake my head in disbelief, actually, it was more in frustration and anger. How could something like this happen? And OK, if it is going to happen, why so badly. What were these people thinking? Were they thinking at all?

The thing that irritates me the most is Canary Wharf's location in the Isle of Dogs region, that is, in London's East End - the heart of London's struggling working class, the heart of the city's unemployment, and the heart of the city's homeless. And yet here we have over 500,000m^2 of unlet office space. What a tease! Furthermore, the project cost almost £1 billion, the mother company is in debt for more than that amount, and now is planning on pouring more money, a further £600 million, into the project in order to hopefully bring some life into the failed mega-project. And still the unemployed and the homeless go on struggling. I have never seen such a misplacement of finances...and then when you actually experience the place itself, you have to wonder even more.

Tottenham Court Road Underground Station, London (September 7, 1993)

It's 23:15 on a muggy, rainy Tuesday night in London. I am one of four people waiting in this lonely Tube station, listening to the sounds of an acoustic guitar and its player's lazy vocals. He is standing in an archway that links the north and south bound platforms of the Northern Line, playing to the tiled wall less than half a metre in front of him. And I wonder how many budding musicians there might be out there in the world, how many budding artists, how many budding anythings for that matter.

This sets off a chain of thoughts in my head. What makes somebody special? What makes somebody stand out in the crowd from the others? Why is this lone musician anonymously playing music in a lonely archway, and Bono is way up there fronting U2? One day I am going to be a famous painter, architect, writer, musician, racing car driver, astronaut...then again, who is to say that I will be any of these things at all?

And they say that only hard work will get somebody somewhere. But what is this guy doing. I am sure that he would prefer to be somewhere else, well, at least playing somewhere else. But, then again, he could be the next "somebody" up there under the limelight. He could be the next "Bono" up there fronting the supergroup...But then again...who knows?

I continue listening to the music. Each note seems to blast out of the archway, and is amplified as it bounces off the Bali billboard, off the vaulted ceiling of the Tube...and some notes are treasured by the few eardrums present in the Tube tonight, but most keep on going on bouncing...off the Viva Air

View from my window, Muswell Hill

Muswell Hill High Street

London from Muswell Hill

London Towers

billboard, off the tiled wall, off the vaulted ceiling, off the plan of the London Underground, off the Middlesex College billboard, and into the endless darkness at the end of the tube, wasting away into that endless darkness.

I think that the London Underground, and what goes on in it, is an integral part of the city, not only as a vital component of its public transport system, but also as the essence of what London is all about. This is London!

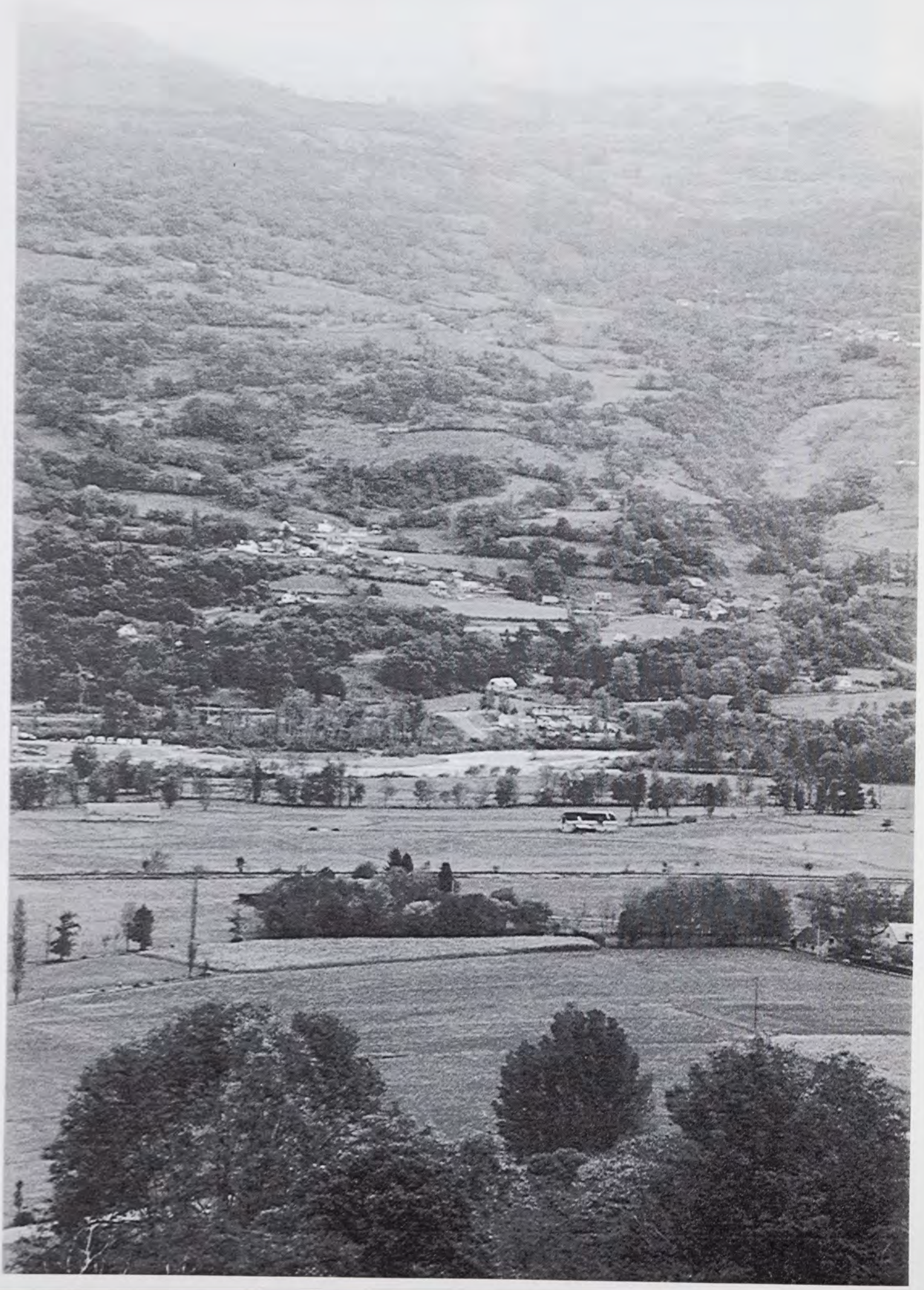
Muswell Hill, North London (September 1993)

What interests me about the place that I am living in is its ability to operate as a tightly defined village within such a large city. In one sense it is a town, and yet on the other, when viewing from the high street with its vistas over the rest of London, you become aware that it is in fact a part of the city.

So what is it then? Is it Muswell Hill's geographic position, as London's highest point, that isolates it, or defines it? Is it the fact that it is slightly off the London Underground line (although, the Underground used to go to Alexander Palace with a separate stop for Muswell Hill, and all North London bus routes go through the town centre, so this is not necessarily a reason)? Or is it simply because of its arrangement as a true town that then links back into the city around it?

I would say that it is the latter reason. I later discovered that "Muswell Hill Village" (as some of the more pretentious middle class residents would like to call it) was originally designed by a group of three architects at the end of the last century. They brought up a series of properties, which was then outside of London, and designed a village as a well defined series of high streets that link into a central round-about, which then links into the surrounding residential areas and parklands, including Alexander Palace (which was England's entry for the World Exposition that was won in France by the Eiffel Tower), and then into other 'villages' in London.

Seeing that the architects designed the dwellings for the village, there is a continuity that runs throughout the entire village, which further defines it, and most importantly, strengthens its identity. Although the format of these dwellings has been altered throughout the years, especially with the property boom towards the end of the 1980's, where many of the owners who were not able to maintain their lavish homes, converted single dwellings into two, or even three, dwellings, there is still the sense of the traditional town. This also made way for a wider mix of people that would now reside in the 'village'.



For my final university design, *The Growth of a Town*, I developed the idea of a town as a "complete package", and established that the town should have a definable centre and a sense of place, regardless of the stage of growth that it is at. But also, I believe that in order for a town to be complete, it must be identifiable *and* autonomous. This ensures that the town breathes and that it can sustain itself, where different parts of the town support others so that the whole town benefits. It is also important that the town is not treated in isolation, and that the concept extends as a network throughout the entire region. A metropolis should consist of identifiable places that are connected, rather than a desert of regions that are by-passed.

Thoughts while watching a documentary on BBC2, London (September 5, 1993)

There is no use having a wonderful design if you do not pass it on and have a real use for it. On the other hand, there is no use designing the *best* something in the world if no-one likes it. It is also appropriate to say that there is no use if the design is so "ugly" that no-one wants it - packaging, or aesthetics, may be superficial, but they are crucial in today's world.

There is a lot to learn about design by simply observing all of the things around us, especially nature. The most effective and sophisticated design is us - humans - the users. But even in the animal kingdom, there are so many lessons to be learnt. The process of design never stops, the latest always becomes obsolete, and the most successful always survives. We can learn from nature to make our own design more appropriate for the future. Natural design is always making subtle changes, and is always evolving, even if it is at the most pain staking rate.

Experimentation is vital for development. This is a necessary part in the evolution of a design, as new possibilities arise. Once we come up with a good system, we stick to it. This may vary slightly, but fundamentally the basics remain the same. Nature supports this approach, as it takes form in so many shapes and sizes. If you were to look under the surface, it is not the differences that you notice, it is the similarities.

Europe - definability or discontinuity? (September 5, 1993)

Earlier I referred to how I could not comprehend the idea of being able to drive from one country to another. As a Sydneysider, you can drive forever and still be in Australia, you can fly *for three hours to the west and* still *be in Australia, and even if you fly to the east across the Pacific Ocean to New Zealand, it is questionable as to whether you will notice any major cultural changes. But today I was thinking about the situation in Europe. Even if we are to take England as an example. This is a country with a population of up to four times that of Australia (even though it is only 1.7% the size of Australia), and a country that had a series of very definable districts, or counties, with ranging cultures and accents. But, modes of transport have rapidly changed the face of England, and not only have motorways cut up the landscape, but these definable districts are rapidly being lost. What is more interesting though, is if we look at Europe as a whole, as new modes of transport are rapidly altering the definition of countries as well. Cities are rapidly linked, distances are becoming less of a barrier, and boundaries are lost. I once read somewhere that we are so busy making bigger roads and faster trains so that people can discover even faster than before that "everything is everywhere alike". This is not far from the truth in Europe, and, especially now with the rise of the E.E.C., it is fast becoming a singular country (if you hold a E.E.C. passport, you do not even have to get the passport stamped when travelling from one country to another, and some businesses already trade in ECU, the new European currency). And what about Great Britain? She was always "separate" from the rest of the continent because of the English Channel, but now, with the new Channel Tunnel, one can travel from London to Paris by rail in less than three hours! It is now the cities, rather than the countries, that are fast becoming the definable economies and cultures.*

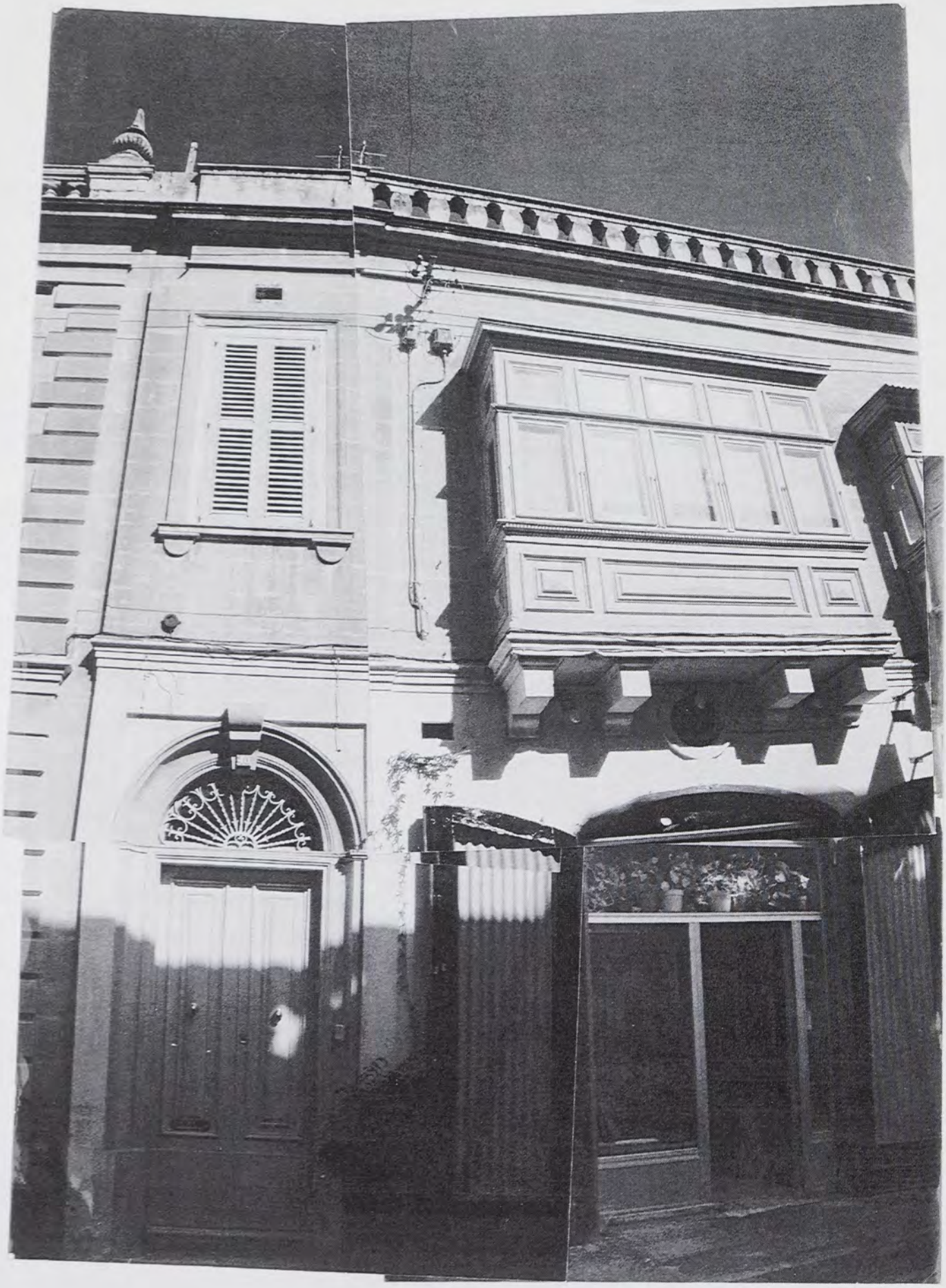
Malta (November 7, 1993)

Well, here I am. It is Sunday evening, 18:30 hours. I have just travelled from Highgate Underground station in North London, changed trains at Piccadilly Circus, and travelled directly to Heathrow Airport. And now I am in the holding lounge for Gate 16, Heathrow Terminal 4, about to board flight KM103. At the moment I am not sure what I am thinking, I am in some sort of a daze, I am not sure if this is real or not...because flight KM103 is going to Malta! Yes, here I am, a full blooded Maltese going to Malta for the very first time. This would be no ordinary trip for any first time visitor to Malta, because, from what I hear, and from the photographs and slides that I have seen, this is a very beautiful and interesting country. It is a tiny Mediterranean island, full of history, culture and architecture. But to me it is much more than this. I am going to see where I have originally come from, that mysterious, dreamlike place that my ancestors have constantly told me about over the last 25 years. That strange language which I have been hearing that I can instinctively understand and respond to, but which my "Australian" tongue has never allowed me to tackle. All the stories, the foods, the water, the fiestas, the churches, the family get-togethers, the warm and friendly people...I am about to see it all and experience it all. I am going to be right in there, and I am going to capture it in my first exhibition.

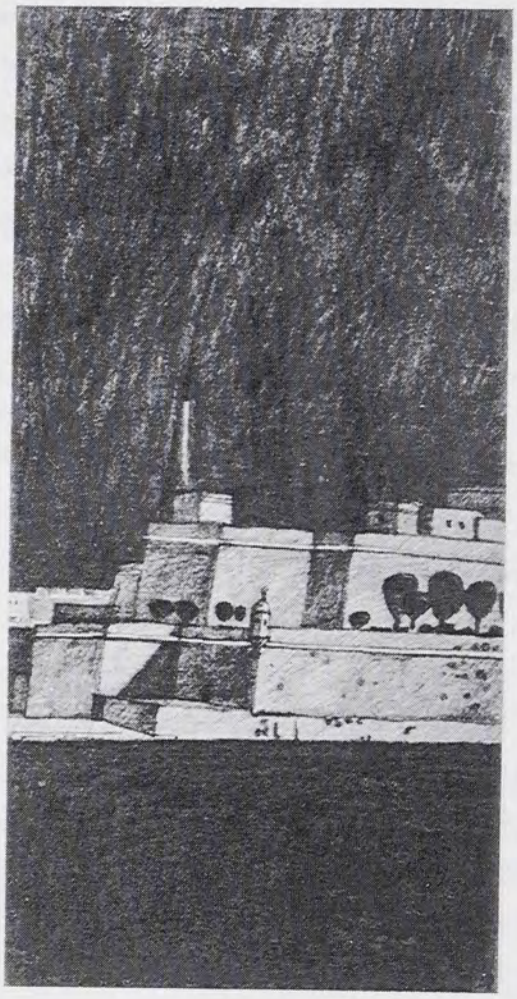
The flight to Malta (November 7, 1993)

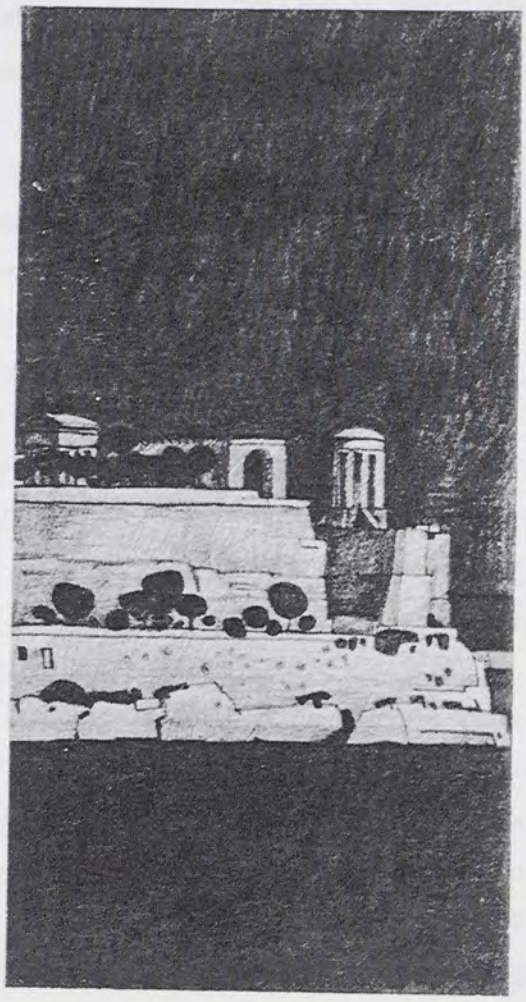
At this stage, it is probably best not to be expecting anything in particular. I have seen so many images of Malta throughout my entire life, so visualising it is not a problem (although I do expect that it will be much better in reality). The thing is, I cannot believe that I am actually going there, and I know that when I do get to Malta it will be a strange experience. When you are in a new place, you tend to take a lot for granted - you are there and everything is around you. It might actually be quite normal, quite comfortable, especially in this case with family all around (even though I have not met any of them before) - I know that I feel comfortable with them already. Or, is it going to be like a dream,or living a life-long dream...I am going to a country that I have longed to travel to all my life? What is more strange though is when I ask myself where this whole experience is going to leave me. Am I Australian...am I Maltese...am I nomadic? And what of the comparisons between Sydney and Malta (and I say Malta, because as a country it is smaller in area than Sydney is as a city, and only has a total national population of 340,000, compared to Sydney's 3.8 million)? I imagine that there will be some major contrasts, especially in the way that the people live, with densities, with the way that people utilize the land, with the way they build their buildings, and with the resultant architecture.

What else do I expect? Lots of food, clear turquoise waters, big blue skies, massy limestone architecture (both grand and humble), colourful boats and forests of television antennae.



"40 Constitution Street"
("The house where my mother was born")





Flying back to London from Malta (November 25, 1993)

I am on board Air Malta flight KM102 heading towards Heathrow now. I just flew over the deep blues of the Mediterranean, over Sardinia and other Italian islands, Monte Carlo...and then the spectacularly rugged mountain scape of the French Alps under the late afternoon sun. I have never seen such stark contrasts as I did between the glowing white peaks against the bottomless blackness of the shadows. Continuing on over fertile valleys with villages and patterns of small plots between tall mountains, and low lying fog over water bodies.

Malta was everything that I expected it to be. It maybe too early to be writing about it, and maybe it is impossible to capture all of those experiences too incredible to comprehend. So for now I will leave the explaining to my paintings.

This is what I discovered.

Firstly, before going to Malta, I was questioning my situation, but now I am very satisfied with my situation as a "Maltese Australian". I discovered and realised a lot about my background, which put a lot into context for me - especially about the way people are, and the reasons why they do things the way they do.

Malta is generally a very comfortable place. The government is claiming full employment (although, there is an unemployment rate of 3.8%), the country is experiencing growth and is quickly developing (possibly too quickly), which is all very good for any country these days, especially for a member of the E.E.C. To me it seemed like a challenge in imagining governing this compact country of only 340,000 people. On the surface, it seems as though it is relatively easy to see what is going on, and what needs to be done. Put it this way, I could see most of the country from my aunty's roof terrace. In a way, the entire country is the equivalent to what I would call a small community.

The Maltese landscape was some of the most inspiring that I have seen to date. The landscape is full of history, stories, hierarchy, 'massy' forms, intricate patterns - as a whole the landscape is very legible. The villages are definable, although closer to Valletta, the capital city, the villages have grown closer together. Nevertheless, there is still a definite sense of the village, as each one is centred about its own enormous, proudly standing basilica. The landscape is utilized in every possible way, each area of land between villages, no matter how rugged, is used for agriculture in an effort to make Malta self sustainable. This is a huge challenge for a country with such limited resources, namely water, and inevitably, the country is forced to import due to the seasonal limitations controlling when certain crops can be grown (although, in the summer Malta does export fruit). I think it is this challenge of self-sustainability that has led to such a rich landscape. The division of plots by limestone walls, prickly pear and wind breaks, the terracing of sloping land into

slithers of useable earth, making for a striped pattern of limestone, grey green vegetation and red Maltese soil.

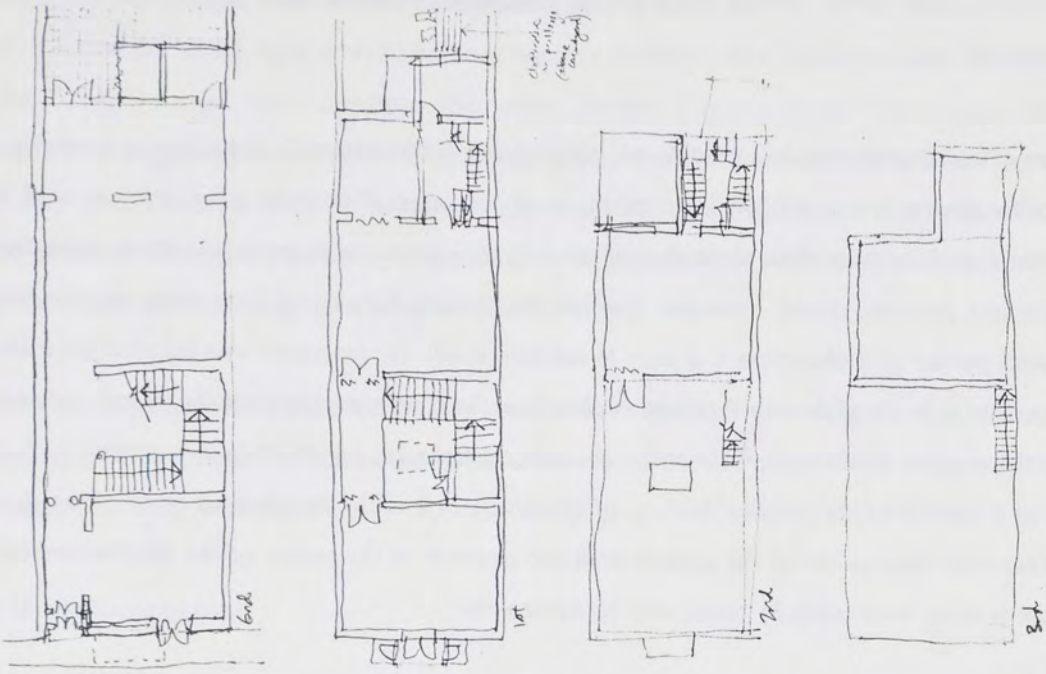
The use of building materials is simple - all building are "of the ground". The island is basically a big rock of limestone, hence, all buildings are made of limestone. This dates all of the way back to the prehistoric architecture, through to that of the islands possessors in modern history, including the Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs, Normans, Spanish, French, the Knights of Saint John, and the English. With each period of architecture it is easy to see how easily the limestone was adapted for a specific use, whether it be for elaborate detailing in churches, the simple dwellings of the island's inhabitants, or for the massive bastions that the cities are characterised by. Incidentally, the systems of bastions serve as a symbol of the peoples' history, of effectively defending the precious island from its many attackers who were aware of the islands strategic position in the centre of the Mediterranean. The island has never been taken by force, only by agreement.

I mentioned earlier that Malta seems to be a comfortable place economically. Comfort, or satisfaction, seems to be a reflection of the easy going people. Although the people work hard, and are very proud of the fact that they always have done, the Maltese also know how to rest. They love to sit or stand and watch life go by, which is the perfect thing to do from the Maltese balconies, the roof terraces, the narrow footpaths, the small corner shops and bars, and from the front of the churches.

The churches are the epitome of Maltese effort. You often see the old men standing, chatting, watching with a sense of pride in front of the church that they built with their own hands. Since Saint Paul was shipwrecked in Malta (in Biblical times), the country has been very Roman Catholic. The church has become central to the peoples' energies, not only as an establishment, but also in the built form. Each church has been funded by the village, and, throughout time the churches have become bigger and grander, meaning that in some cases the entire income of a village would go into the building of the church. This concentration of resources is very obvious in the Maltese landscape.

On the smaller scale, nothing is wasted in Malta. This seems to be a characteristic of the crafts. Whilst everybody works with their hands, and people generally do all the work on their houses themselves, there is a sense of using what you can. I would call it "make do crafts". For example, using an old timber crate as a gate, or using a sausage tin to keep a car's muffler together.

Modern dwellings take on the vernacular form and construction has changed very little, although reinforced concrete is now generally used for frames. All walls are constructed of limestone blocks, both internally and externally. External walls simply rely on the thickness of the blocks for waterproofing, and although walls may be painted, traditionally the stone was left raw as it naturally weathers and becomes less porous. Floors are of precast concrete, spanning no more than 7 metres



"Typical Maltese Terrace Plan"

"Luzzu"

and allowing for two floors above. Timber beams were used in pre-war houses when slabs were unable to achieve longer spans.

A basic plan of the traditional Maltese dwelling would be as follows. One enters the dwelling at street level through a small vestibule which leads into a grand hallway. Off this is a sitting room, a gran stairway (with light well), and then through to the dining and kitchen area. There is a small outdoor area beyond. Upstairs there are the bedrooms, the master bedroom being located at the front of the dwelling with a "Maltese Balcony" that overlooks the street, and bathroom. Above this is the roof terrace (and sometimes an extra bedroom that leads onto the roof terrace, with a further roof terrace above).

I am flying over England again now. I notice the differences - the lack of light, the deep green, the pockets of snow, the shapes and the size of the fields (I never thought that I would be saying that they are big), the organic village layouts.

Reflecting about Malta from London (early December, 1993)

I was thinking about the architecture that I experienced in Malta, and it occurred to me that there were many lessons to be learnt. Although there is a sense for minimal ornament (applied as standard components in the forms of Maltese Balconies, louvred windows and light steel balconies) style was less of a debatable, or competitive, issue. And, although some of this "rough and ready" quality can lead to a certain "ugliness", and that building regulations are relatively loose (I was shocked to see some of the things that people can get away with) I think that there is something to be learnt from the overall "natural' beauty of the architecture, or, more specifically, the naturalness *of the village as a whole.*

Keeping this in mind, I then proceeded to thinking back to my architectural education and some of the things that I would see going on about me. The first point was that there was no singular school of thought. Sure that this can lead to a richness, diversity and a range of ways of thinking, but I think that the problem lies in the whole area of style, *and more specifically, the superficiality of style. Then there is the effect of the media, especially with the availability of information through magazines. This made me think of architects today, sitting there designing with a pile of magazines layed out open at their "favourite" pages, taking bits and pieces from here and there, with no singular line of thought flowing through in the design process.*

I have learnt a lot by looking at very simple pieces of architecture that are relatively untouched by the competitiveness of style, especially those which I examined in Malta. Here we see cases of designing purely from a functional point of view. Such quaint houses they are, all pretty much based

"Senglea"

"Limestone Wall"

on the same layout, but made special by the little touches of the inhabitants. They are also made special by such standard developments as the Maltese Balcony", which has evolved from the place itself, from the climate and from what the people like to do best. It is these things that then give the architecture its special qualities, and its individuality...and I do believe that these things evolve naturally.

I then thought back to university, and, going through the design process on one particular project. Deconstructivism was big at the time. I did not go as far as some other students were going, but I did get caught up in the more superficial sides of architecture, and started rotating elements by angles of 2 to 3 degrees, and then came up with excuses to justify it. If only I had stuck with the strong ideas and what the design was really about, because in the end it only complicated what could have been quite an elegant design.

Some of my paintings from Malta

Senglea

This painting was initially an exploration of the three basic *layers* - the water, the land and the sky. In Malta, because of how built up the environment is, it is quite often that the land component of the landscape becomes building (which is an interesting point seeing that building is of the land, that is, both land and building are limestone). I was interested in the effects of light on such strong geometric forms, and more importantly, the effects of light on a regular material. The result is a hard pattern of light and dark, but because of the fact that there is so much light in Malta, the shadows are not so deep, which can often lead to flatter areas in the urban scape. This is a perfect starting point for my second interest in the painting - *pattern*. It is interesting that once you have the pattern, you can start pulling things forward and sending things back in order to start suggesting depth. I was conscious to keep this to a minimum so as not to lose the pattern - so I simply outlined the central building to bring it forward (because it was receiving the most light), and strengthened a few of the harder edges. The only exception to the pattern is the mystical form of the church dome at the top, reflecting the fact that the churches are so dominating in the Maltese landscape. Then only the form of the trees and the mast of a boat "slip" past the pattern to ensure that there is a foreground.

Limestone Wall

The layering of the landscape takes priority again in this painting, except in this time the layers are just the land and the sky. The land component is further broken down into the patterning of the limestone wall under the strong light, and then the layered landscape beyond. There is a "make-do" quality to the landscape, comprising of strips of farm broken by walls and the odd building and tree. This is a *carved* landscape, that is, there is not a single area of the land that is not touched by man.

"Boat-house"

"Maria Ausiliatrice"

"Farms at Dingli"

This is why I strengthened this striped notion to further express man's attempt to control the land, and his attempt to bring some good of the limited resources that there are to work with. Once again the church is the dominating element. There was something so incredibly spiritual about the shining silver domes of the church, even though the majority of the form was sitting behind the landscape. I strengthened this notion by cutting the deep blue sky around the church. Although whimsical, this further attracts attention. There is almost a paper cut out feel to the church now - it no longer seems real, but the church's mystical qualities and domination of the landscape are strengthened.

Boathouse

I was attracted to the strong colours of the red door to the balcony and the big pink doors against the washed limestone. The painting is about built form, and is treated as a flat pattern of colour, with the portrayal of depth by "throwing" in lines and deeper areas of shadow. For example, the suggestion of folds in the canvas pulls the boat into the foreground. Then there are the whimsical notions of Maltese detailing, including the joinery of the balcony balustrades and the typical "make-do" electrical wiring. The shadows of balconies to the right suggests a broader picture and neighbouring boathouses of a similar quality. The colour not only speaks for itself, but it also says a lot about the people. I am quite satisfied with how much feeling and personality the colour provides without actually having to portray people at all.

Farms at Dingli

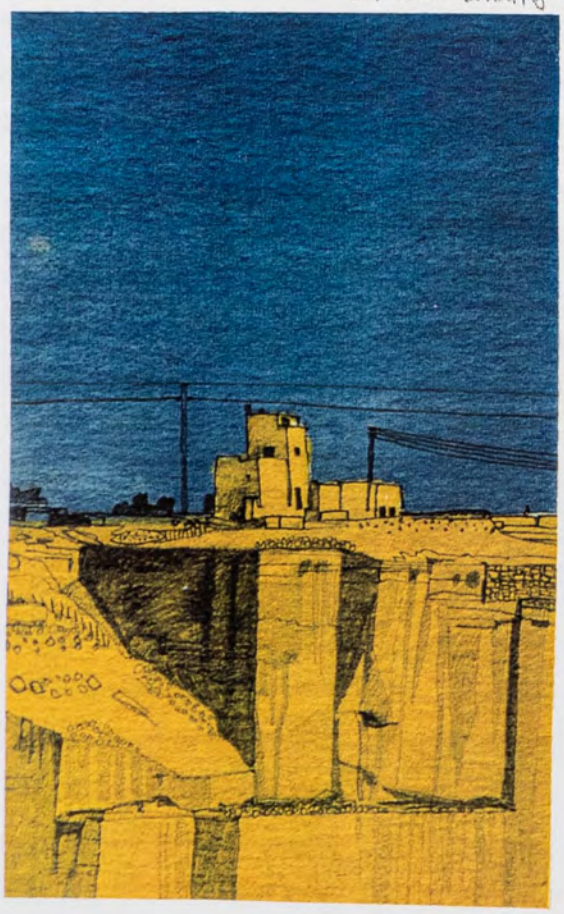
The layers of the land are reversed this time, as I was looking down onto this "ready-made" composition from above. So we have the land, the deep blue sea (so much a part of the Maltese way of life) and the sky. This painting says so much about the way the Maltese use the land - the painting captures the fact that they use every possible portion of land (these farms sit on top of a shear cliff), and how they use it in such a "patchy" fashion...a bit of this here, a wall there, some prickly pear there, a small building here and another there, a track to get from here to there, and a plot for growing something over there...I was fascinated by the pattern that this made, and the contrasts of these "bits and pieces" on the flat green of the land sitting hard above the big sea.

Maria Ausiliatrice

This building facade is another thing that says so much about the Maltese people. The ladders make the most interesting pattern of form and shadow against the freshly painted wall (the ladders had been left there on the pavement for the entire week!). The balcony with the door below provide two vantage points for sitting or standing and watching from. I was particularly interested in the way the form of the balcony sits separately from the wall - it simply comprises of a timber frame on a cantilevered limestone slab with a corrugated iron roof. The facade is all very simple, with touches of personality provided by the steel joinery, moulding to timber panels, limestone cornices and the gem of a small blue ceramic Madonna relief...and, of course, the name of the house, *Maria Ausiliatrice*. I was very

"Mellieha Ridge"

"Limestone Quarry"



happy with the composition and how much variation of shadow and form that could be achieved on a flat plane.

Mellieha Ridge

This painting was probably the ultimate "vision" in the layering of the landscape. The pattern of stripes was a very inspiring starting point, and it made me start to think about the way the landscape can influence design, and how this could become the starting point for other applications. I was especially interested in how the limestone wall defined the stripes of green grass and freshly ploughed red Maltese soil. A level of realism was provided by the inclusion of the buildings on the ridge, the road, the telegraph posts, and the suggestion of built form in the lower left corner.

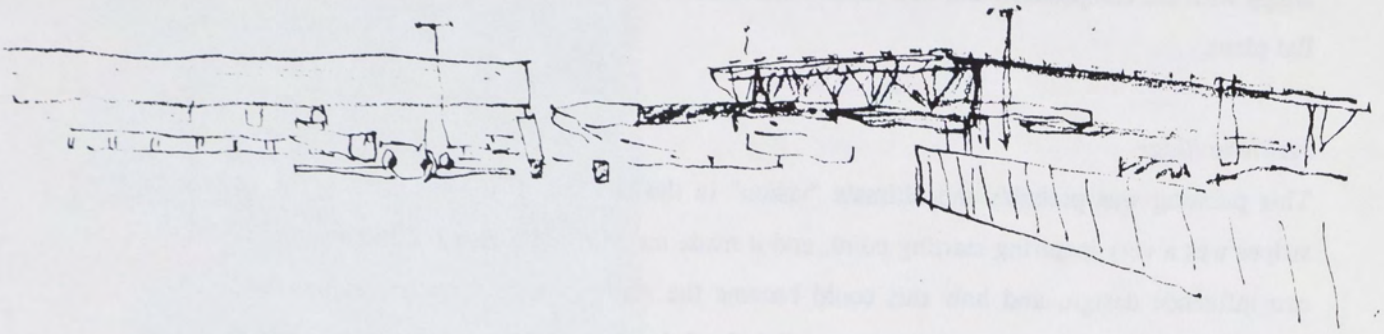
Limestone Quarry

This painting represented the most direct progression of the concept of the built form being of the land - with a building sitting directly above the hard forms of the quarry. The building grows directly out of the ground.

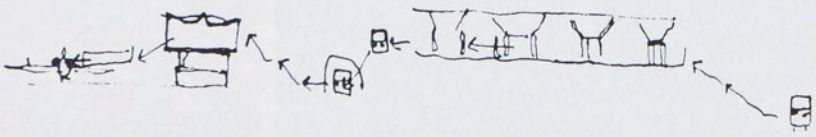
Villages, Gozo

The landscape reads so clearly in this pencil drawing. There is so much to learnt from the clustered forms of the village buildings arranged off a singular road with the patchwork of terraced fields beyond. Once again, the church stands proud over the landscape.

"Villages, Gozo"



From Gate 21"



process.
"up + down"

Stansted Airport (December 13, 1993)

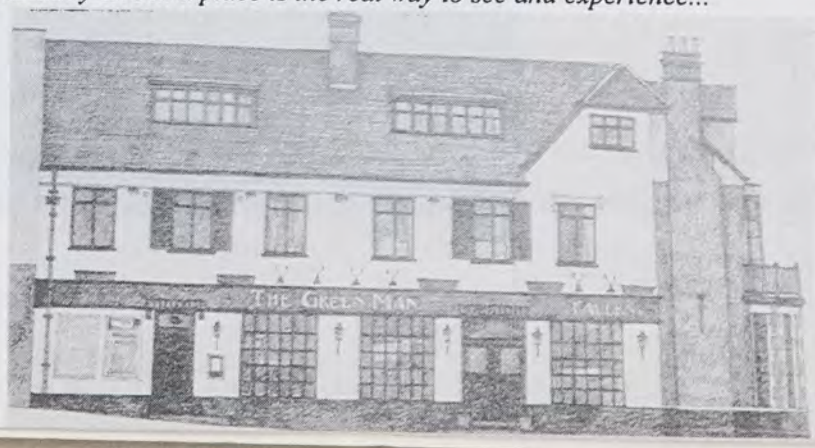
After arriving on the British Rail Stansted Express from Tottenham Hale, I was thrust from underneath Stansted Airport into the most amazing open space. I was taken in by the lightness of the quilt of square domes floating above, the flying struts, and the service pods that articulate the space. All of this created the most amazing sense of space and light. And although the space is so large, I am amazed at the sense of scale, and how something makes it work. Maybe it is the solid mass of the service pods (which are about 5 metres tall) that articulate the space, with their struts growing upward into the volume like the branches of a tree to support the spectacular roof structure that appears to float more than 15 metres above my head.

But as I moved towards the back of the main concourse after check-in, and as I began to accept the overall structure that is Stansted Airport, I began to notice the building's contents. I found the positioning of some of the smaller volumes a bit uncomfortable. This is especially so with the retail outlets. It is as though they have been 'plonked' there in a clumsy fashion independently of the overall design. Sure these are the result of independent tenders, but I did begin to wonder if the overall design did not allow for smaller spaces and screens to sit within it. This observation raised a few questions. Is the structure too definite, too rigid, too controlling? Is it simply because Foster has obsessively custom designed each and every item for the terminal down to the last detail, making the shops appear even louder? Or is it simply because the overall building is so pure that it becomes so dominating to the point that anything else that sits in it looks so awkward?

When I passed through security, a series of standard detecting machines that looked very temporary within the enormous space, I felt as though I was in the same part of the building. There was no sense of progression like in other airport buildings. I did not feel that I had progressed until I had left the main building, where I boarded the monorail shuttle, alighted the monorail, went up two sets of escalators into boarding lounge 21, only to go down another escalator, through the aerobridge, and finally onto the aircraft bound for Cork City, Ireland.

London, January 2, 1994

...while sitting drinking a pint of lager in my local, The Green Man, in Muswell Hill (which I also work in, and am currently living above), I listen to classic English 'Pop.' and 'Underground' music. Right now the Clash's "That's Entertainment" is on the juke box. I am getting into the grain of things. This is the way to travel...to actually live *in a place is the real way to see and experience...*



"From Temple Tube, just after booking my Qantas ticket home"

"Harbour Race"

What am I getting out of my painting? (January 2, 1994)

Since I have been overseas, I have been doing a lot of painting and the putting together of exhibitions. I have realised that it is such a direct way to express my ideas, thoughts and feelings. It is as though I am testing myself, like I am actually hanging myself up there on the walls in public so that I can get feed back and response for my latest and rawest ideas.

At the moment it is difficult to say exactly what the process has been. I think that the main thing is the need to capture and record those very special things and experiences in my travels. Given that it is only the important things that have moved me to capture them in the first place, the concern then becomes capturing this in such a way so as to communicate this in the clearest and most direct way. In a way, my intention is to make it easier for other people to appreciate things that they have not seen before, or may not have had a chance to have appreciated before.

It has been interesting though, as I still have not yet been moved to paint anything in London yet, even though this is the place where I have spent most of my time overseas. Is it because I have spent so much time here that it has become my "home away from home"? Or is it because London is so dull and grey, both architecturally and climatically? And, seeing that the majority of my painting has been to do with capturing light, and big blue skies, I wonder if I have been searching for those things that I miss from home.

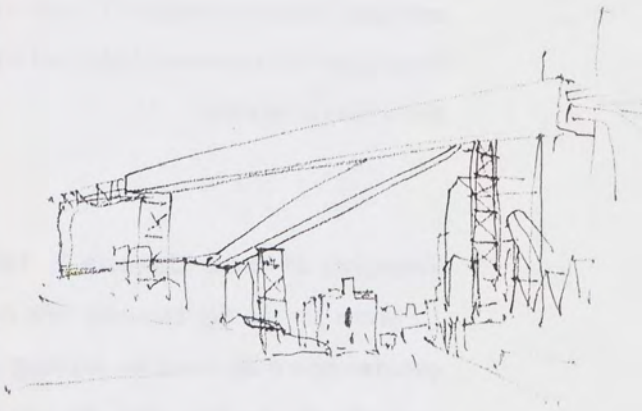
Thoughts of home (January 2, 1994)

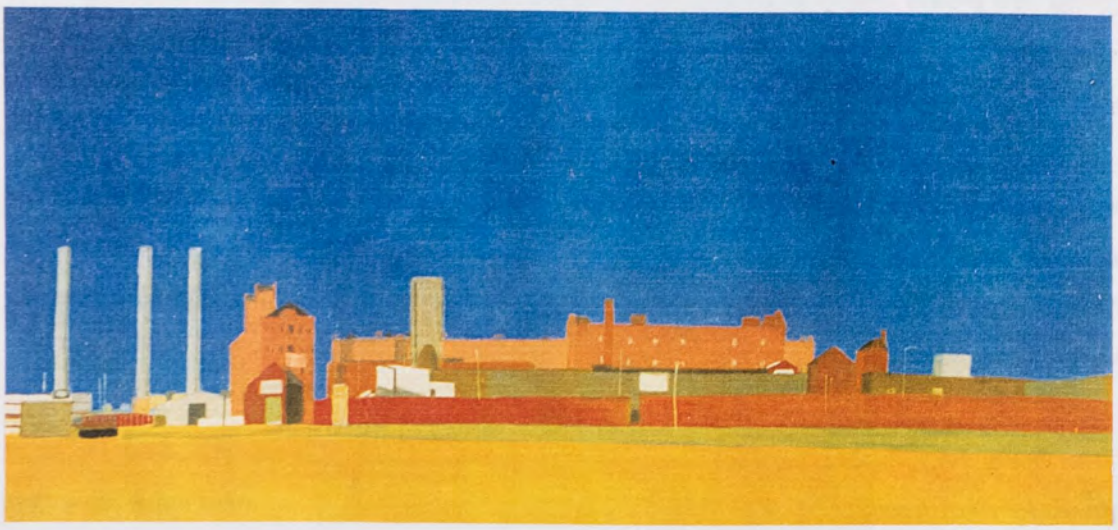
...I yearn for the big blue sky, that big blue sky that I used to hear people talk about, and would question how a sky could be anything else (and after being in London I now know what they mean). I yearn for the big blue seas, the sandy coastlines broken by rocky headlands, the randomness and abundance of our very distinctive native flora, the clean white trunks of ghost gums, the rolling swell of the sea, the harsh bushlands, the red centre (that I still have not seen, but know that I will one day), fresh new growth after rainfall against the red earth, terra-cotta roofs against vivid blue skies, fibro houses with rusty corrugated iron roofs, beautiful Sydney and its harbour, Sydney's low prices, Sydney's way of living, the comfortable cost of living...I could go on forever.

Yeah, it is when you are away from a place that you realise how special it is. When in Sydney, and having never been away, it seemed that there was nothing to do but complain, but on getting away (and admittedly you do see very special things that you cannot see at home) I really have come to appreciate how special Sydney is.

And since being away, Sydney has won the Olympic bid for the year 2000. It was incredible for me as a Sydneysider away from Sydney, and the Olympics have probably been in my mind much more than

"Liverpool Warehouse"

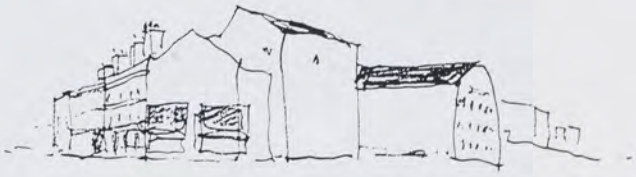




"Liverpool"

if I had been in Sydney. I think that it is a very important opportunity for Sydney to consolidate itself. Now things have *to happen, and they* have *to be special. This can be a vital time for tending to problems that we do have, especially racially. There is so much than can be done architecturally, not only as a statement, but also as a long lasting benefit for all people as well. And the opening ceremonies and associated events can be the ultimate, and honest, experience of everything that Australia (both new and old, past, present and future, as a part of the Commonwealth and as a republic) stands for. What an opportunity!*

I keep imagining what I would do if I were to orchestrate the opening ceremony - all these things that make Australia Australia, especially those things that I did not realise until I was actually away from Australia - the colours, the movement, the action, the lifestyle, the history, the people, the culture. All those details that make Australia, no matter how whimsical or unimportant they may seem. Australia is developing an identity.



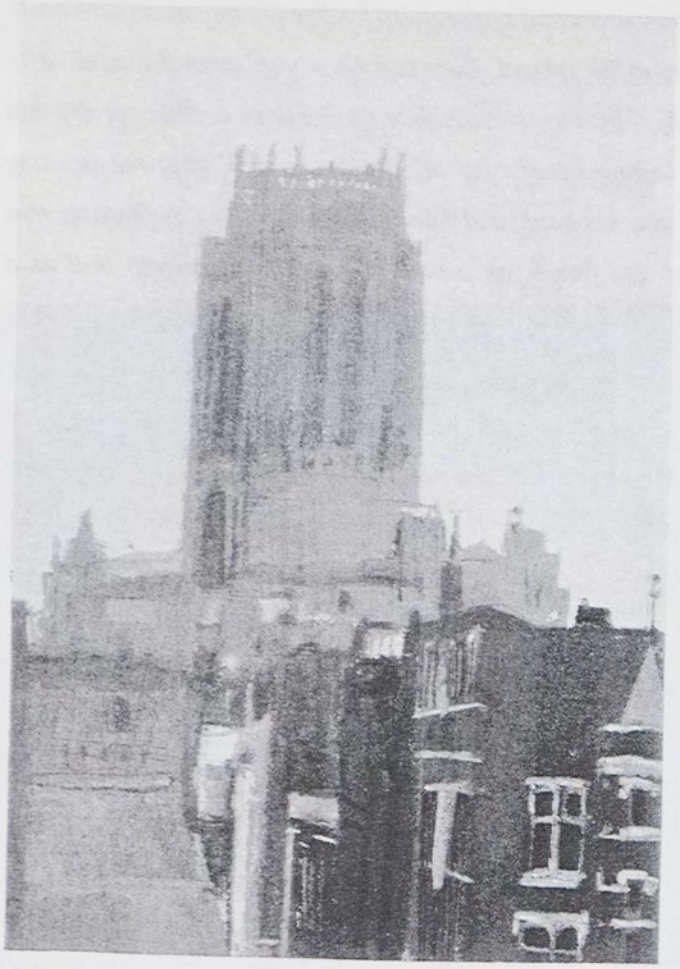
Liverpool, England (January 7, 1994)

I was fascinated by the large expanse of deserted industry - a desert of huge built forms that were once buzzing with movement and production. I was fortunate to be roaming the Liverpool docklands on a crisp winters day under the blue sky that I had never seen in England before. And as the sun set, the red of the brickwork got deeper and deeper. And all the time, past the 1830's stone wall, I would get glimpses of the glittering Mersey, once the life source of Liverpool. I would go on to visit Penny Lane, Strawberry Fields, The Cavern. It was not difficult to imagine the excitement. The city is dotted with sculptures and plaques in recognition of the "Fab 4".

Runcorn, England - a "New City" (January 8, 1994)

I went by an entire hillside covered in linear concrete blocks that was once, apparently, considered an architectural masterpiece. Now it is nothing more than a social disgrace. This was supposed to be the new city, the direction for the future. A local accompanying me added that it is now the under age pregnancy capital of England. (Incedentally, in July 1994, I was speaking to a young Liverpudlian architect who informed me that the "masterpiece" was actually James Stirling's Southgate *housing estate. It was demolished in May.)*

I stayed in an estate in the outer parts of Runcorn which was less of an architectural statement. It was a pleasant, dainty 1960's bricked townhouse development set on narrow roads, arranged about an old village, consisting of a public house and a farm building. But as I walked towards the "shopping city", I could sense something depressing in the air. Was it the groups of young mothers pushing prams up and down concrete ramp systems and down winding paths too dangerous to walk down at



"Hope Street"

night? Was it the children getting up to mischief behind hedges, smashing shopping trolleys? Was it the children playing in the mud under the enormous concrete flyover for buses only? Was it the "shopping city" itself, now only 25% occupied and full of scaffolding from a refurbishing venture that stopped three years ago, with glass curtain walls making obvious targets for bored children, only to expose concrete block walls beyond?

Sydney bushfires (January 8, 1994)

It is scary when I read back over the previous pages..."what I yearn for in Sydney"...and I think now that much of it is burning and is being reduced to a moonscape. The fires are having a deep effect on me as a Sydneysider living on the other side of the world. I cannot imagine the effect it is having on people in Sydney. It is frustrating to know that it is all so far away, and that even if I was there, there is not a great deal I could do anyway. I wish that we could somehow average the world out - to think that Sydney desperately needs rain, and all I have seen in England for the last three months is rain every single day!

More about my painting, London (February, 1994)

I guess that by now, readers of these writings are probably wondering what all of this has to do with architecture. I have hardly talked about architecture directly, but, then again, I have talked of the things that architecture is made of - *real* places and *real* people. And through my explorations and paintings, I have expressed what I have taken in and what I have learnt. I have been putting together exhibitions of my paintings based on themes. The first two, for example, went under the title of "Images", which were a collection of images from my travels. I would describe them as recordings of landscapes, both natural and man made, and how these two can interact...and this is what I think architecture, especially the urban design component, should be all about.

So I have recorded these striking things around me, those striking landscapes, and this is how I have been learning about architecture. It certainly has been a personal journey, but one can learn so much if they learn in their own way. And for me, by painting it, it forces me to analyse, to breakdown and to reinterpret.

An old man once observed the fact that there is no people in my paintings. This is a fair comment. But as I have discovered (especially in the Maltese paintings), it is not that I cannot paint people, it is more that (at the moment) I am interested in looking at the marks people make, and how they have effected (or not effected), crafted (or "uncrafted") the landscape. I have decided that it would be too obvious and distracting to portray people when I am really interested in the effects of people.

"OT" (Upward Movement I"

Man's way of marking the landscape is via architecture (and urban design). I have been analysing the way that the landscape effects architecture and the way that architecture effects the landscape.

Painting, London (February 8, 1994)

While I have been in Europe, I have been taking a photographic record of all of my paintings. Today I noted how important it is to take "detail shots" of my paintings, that is, close up photographs of the parts that I am most happy with. This allows me to observe the *internal composition* of a work in isolation from the overall composition. I am finding that quite often it is this internal composition that is the essence of the work, and, in keeping a record photographically, it will provide the starting point for me to pursue such compositions at a later date. This idea also provides a lot of starting points in the actual design process - a continual process of looking into the structure of something, pulling it apart, and reworking it in order to achieve the desired final product.

Reading (March 1, 1994)

I just read an article about I.M.Pei in the Sunday Express *of February 27, 1994. It was refreshing considering that it is probably the first time I have read about architecture for over eight months. There was not a lot that struck me in the article, but a few simple points stood out. I.M.Pei said that by looking at the Cubist painters and sculptors, especially Picasso, Archipenko and Laurens, he learnt how to look at architecture, and how to read architecture. In terms of education, he believes that his teacher, Gropius (I.M.Pei was a student at the Bauhaus), did not teach him how to design, but taught him* how to think *and how to analyse. I.M.Pei goes on to stress the importance of the human element, that is,* people and life. *Life is the key, and living life is a priceless resource.*

Returning to Sydney (March 1, 1994)

I return to Sydney in just on two months now. I will not realise what I am getting out of this trip until I am back. Returning will be as important as leaving. Not only will I be able to look back on all of that I have learnt, but I will be able to look at both the natural and built environment of my home in a new way.

Churchill Hill Spring

Birmingham

Muswell Hill on a early Spring afternoon (March 3, 1994)

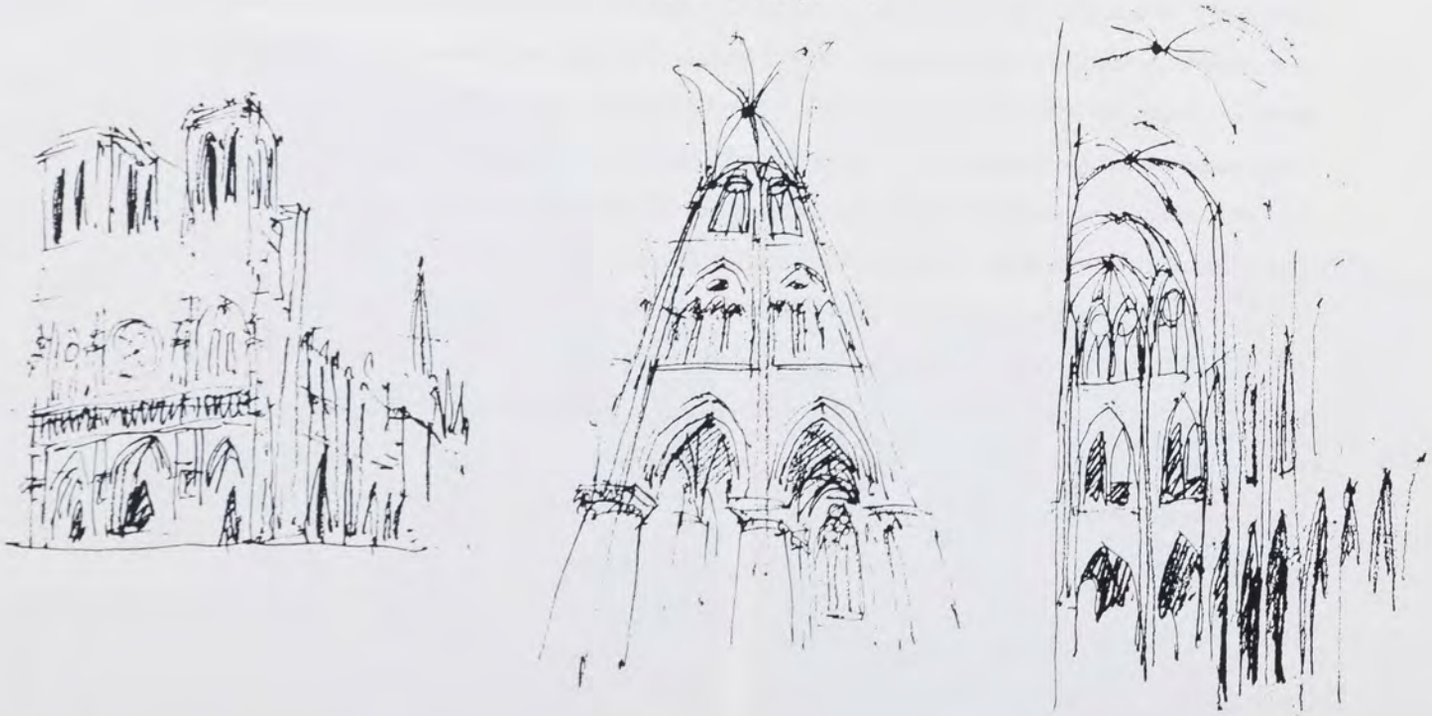
I have never noticed Spring as much as I have in England. Throughout the winter I did not see much light, and hardly ever saw any sign of green. But when Spring comes along, there are signs of new life everywhere. Trees blossom and explode pink and white, buds spurt lush green leaves, and bulbs shoot flowers from the ground. I walked around Muswell Hill on this particular late afternoon and took in the sense of place in the "village within the city", noting the hierarchy from the high street down to the residential. Back in my room, I took in the rare views back over London from my window. I still find the rows and rows of high rise housing fascinating.

Birmingham, England (March 7, 1994)

I set out today with a black and white film in my camera. I had imagined what Birmingham might be like - an overcast sky with very little light and colour to capture, so I could really play this up with black and white film. The thing is, my explorations turned out to be even duller than I had thought. I set out from Chester Street on a sparkling new electric train, the "Centro" (a bit of a novelty really), and looked across a monochromatic sea of dark red bricked buildings with dark tiles, chimneys, the grey forms of leafless trees, and distant concrete housing blocks. After getting off the train at New Street Station, I headed out of a nondescript shopping complex, down a typical shopping mall, and followed the tourist signs to the civic buildings that the locals had told me Birmingham was famous for. On arrival at the first civic space, it was not the new buildings that I was impressed by, but the grandeur of the Neo-Classical buildings (Town Hall, Art Gallery and Museum). I proceeded on through the post-modern library complex, into the civic centre, a promenade running parallel to Broad Street, which leads to the new Convention Centre (which I was not impressed with either).

The urban spaces, and the progression of urban spaces from the public transport nodal point to civic centres was impressive, but the buildings that flanked these leave a lot to be desired. It seems to me that modern architecture in Birmingham is both dull and lacking imagination, and only takes away from the classically styled buildings. I continued beyond the Convention Centre, where I encountered some rather clever landscaping which made use of a historic canal junction and a pedestrian system that wove along and over the water. This landscaping incorporated the red brickwork and wrought iron of the rich, but disused, Victorian industrial architecture of the area. I then walked around the platform of the International Indoor Sports Arena, and viewed the city of Birmingham - a sea of housing pierced by rows of high rise housing, and sliced by motorways, arterial roads and railways. Once again I was more attracted to the old industrial buildings that the new civic buildings attempt to play homage to by the inclusion of token plug-on red brick boxes. It is funny that the originals, and the more interesting, have been left in ruins.

Notre Dame, Paris



In total, I only ended up taking ten photographs. Beyond the first two shots I decided that not only would I play on the dullness of the city, but also the ugliness of the city, an ugliness on a mega scale. Birmingham is supposed to be England's "second city". I feel that she was not only "just another city", but, more specifically, it was yet another city to fall victim to the blunders of Fifties and Sixties attitudes in British architecture and the rebuilding schemes after World War Two.

Thoughts on going home (March 18, 1994)

It is getting closer to the time when I will have to return to Sydney. I keep looking forward to the things that I will have again. I also keep thinking of the things that I will miss in London. I will miss the establishments, all the galleries, and theatres, and its accessibility to other countries. But then I think of all the natural advantages of Sydney, its uniqueness as a city, its natural history, its versatility, its richness, its developing culture, its (relative) positivity, its looking to the future. It is all of these things that we should recognise, appreciate and maintain as the things that make Sydney special. All of this should be utilized in the city's future planning.

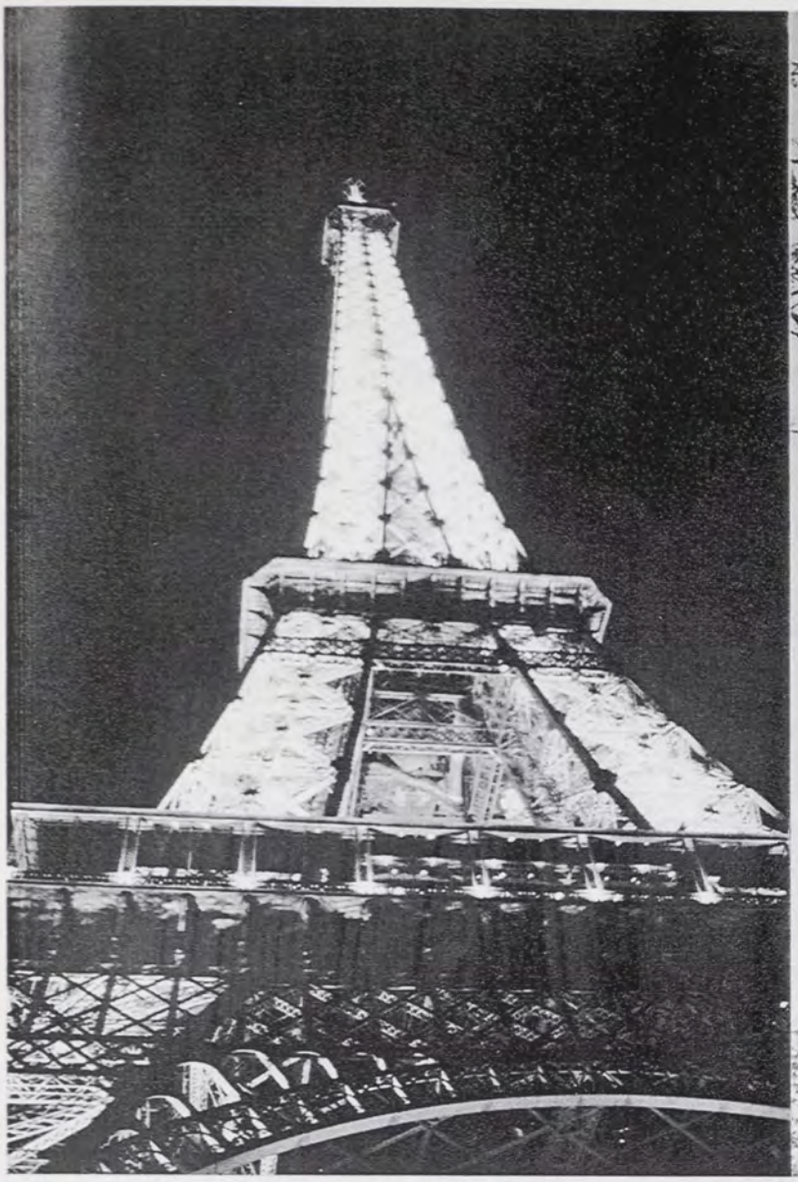
Monmartre, Paris (April 7, 1994)

It has been a life long dream of mine visit Paris. My preconceptions of Paris relate back to reading about the romanticised lifestyles of Impressionist painters, the city's strong presence in architectural journals and books (which tends to be idealised anyway), and the continual references throughout my education,. So before I had come to Paris, I basically had a good idea of what I wanted to see. Knowing that I had limited time, I culled the entries in my itinerary down to the minimum - Eiffel Tower, Arc de Triomphe, La Grande Arche, Centre Pompidou, I.M.Pei's pyramid at the Louvre, and some of the Grande Projects, including Parc de la Villette and Institut du Monde Arabe. I really had no idea of how much more I could expect, or how special this city really could be.

Reflecting about Paris (April 7, 1994)

I am now on a train heading away from Paris to Boulogne. Many words spring to mind at the moment - grand, wonderful, beautiful, elegant - but the word awesome *is the one that sticks to my mind the most. I expected so much from the city, and was even thinking that I may return disappointed, but I ended up getting so much more than I could have ever expected from this first visit. There is such a ring about "Paris", or saying that I have just been to "Paris"...and now I understand that the city deserves its reputation.*

It probably sounds very "touristy" to say that the first thing that I wanted to see was the Eiffel Tower, but I had decided to do this more out of practical reasons than anything else (that is, simply so that I



Eiffel Tower

La Grande Arche

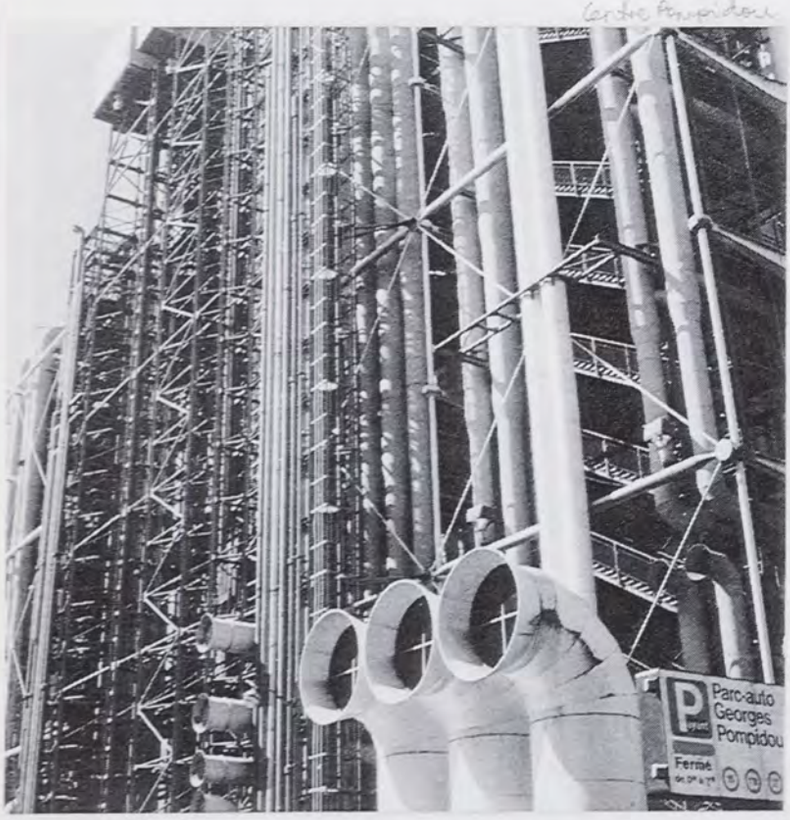
could orientate myself and view over all of Paris at once). After exiting the 'Metro' at Champ de Mars, "awesome" *was all I could think. I was confronted with this magnificent steel structure that is the Eiffel Tower against one of those rare European blue skies. All that steel, and how elegantly that steel is put together, could only stand for how bold a statement the Pariseans could make...and to think that this was designed and built more than one hundred years ago. Due to high winds, I could only get to the second level (only one third of the way up the tower), but even from here I could see what the rest of the city of Paris was about - so compact, and well set out along avenues springing from other monuments and grand public buildings. This is an urban landscape so clear and easy to read. There are so many notable landmarks to pick out standing over the landscape. I am glad that this was the first thing I saw, because it certainly set the spirit for the what I was going to experience.*

The shear scale and grandness of such buildings as La Grande Arche was personally beyond description. The question that I continuously asked myself, especially after seeing such indulgences as Parc de la Villette, was, "How come buildings like this do not happen more often?" "How did they spend so much money on these buildings?" At a civic level, this is architecture at its purest artistic level serving the purpose of being aesthetically pleasing. But then I realised the thing that differentiates a city like Paris from other cities like London and Sydney (where, if even these buildings were proposed, there would be such a public outcry). The difference is culture. *I sensed culture at the "everyday level" - when I was in the Metro, or in bars and cafes, or generally walking around and looking at shops, or watching children laughing and playing in public squares. Even standing at balconies, simply watching and looking as many Europeans tend to do (which becomes so much a feature of the architecture, and hence taller and vertical openings). This culture comes out in the people's attitudes, which in turn effect things like the expenditure of public money. And because people generally appreciate art (just look at the size of the Louvre, the number of art galleries and the artists in the street), the expenditure of money on art becomes a part of life - and this art includes architecture. Coincidentally, I just read an article in* The Independent *(April 7, 1994) about the Centre Pompidou, which only furthers how public works are such a high priority, and how this building, which has become a "reference for the twentieth century", was devoted to President Georges Pompidou as one of the architects of modern France. Art is a way of life and the resultant architecture is purely an expression of this.*

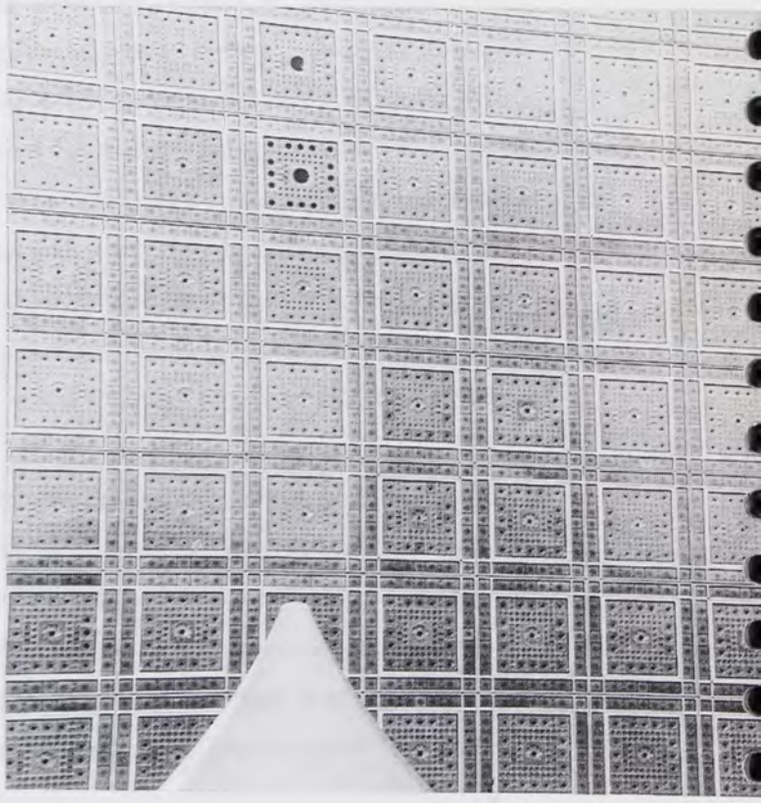
Public housing, or, housing in general, also left me asking similar questions. That is, how can such elaborate and "architectural" housing developments be justified? I Think that a lot of these Parisean developments are brilliant, but then I had to think that architects at the time of developments that are now absolute disasters must have thought the same when their developments had happened, otherwise they would not have happened in the first place (just look at the housing in Islington in London, Runcorn near Liverpool and Birmingham, all in states of disrepair and producing high crime and

housing near Parc de la Villette

Centre Pompidou



Institut du Monde Arabe



under age pregnancy rates). Many housing schemes have been high in the architectural thinking that went behind the period, but neglected to think about the social effects.

But in Paris, I saw many housing schemes that left me gasping, "...and to think that this is actually *housing!" My mind would think back to schemes that I was more familiar with, and how these Parisian ones could very well end up like the ones I experienced in England. But as I looked about, and remembered where I was (at Cite de Sciences et de l Industrilles in Parc de la Villette), a very clear distinction became all to obvious. Here I was standing by an internationally recognised building in a beautiful and indulgent park looking at housing blocks. Imagine how this makes the residents feel. They have got something to be proud of, something that they can be a part of, something that they can escape to, something to show people. The residents are aware that there are people coming from all over the world to see things that there home is in the middle of. I do not think that the residents in the housing blocks of England would have the same pride.*

This mix of use and attractions is what makes the difference, an assurance that there will always be people coming through the area, and that money will be invested in the region for maintenance. Who knows if the architecture will stand up to the test of time, but at least there will always be the attraction of people and an appreciation of bold statements.

There is an elegance *about everything in Paris, so maybe these bold statements that I just referred to are actually more like natural statements. Even when it comes to fashion, the people are not trying because it is a natural expression for them. (A friend noted that even the "seedier" side of town, around the Moulin Rouge, had some sort of an elegance about it.) This elegance, or* confidence, *follows right through to the smallest details - when I was at Gare du Nord, I noticed that with everything from garbage bins and public seating through to the new TGF trains, there was no question as to whether these things were beautiful or not. There is such a quality of design, and this has to come from this* awareness *as a people.*

Tate Gallery, London (April 17, 1994)

I am at the Picasso exhibition at the Tate, and I am watching a little boy do a drawing of Picasso's "Large Profile". I am amazed, this is a perfect recreation...line by line, element by element, form by form. He, so uninhibited, notes everything that there was to be noted. I feel privileged to be able to experience this, what a learning experience this is. (And then he quickly, and proudly, popped the precious drawing into his back-pack as a school boy would carelessly treat a piece of school work, and ran off.)

This makes me realise how important it is to draw. One has to think about each and every line that is drawn, and one has to observe so carefully in order to get these lines down onto paper. Seeing this little boy gives me confidence about the process that I am going through. Being uninhibited and honest is what learning is all about. It does not really matter how ignorant the observations may be. What is important is getting them down in writing, even if it means going back over the writing in the years to come so that I can see how much I have learnt since then. This is what the learning process is all about.

Wisdom is a precious thing.

Flight QF2 to Sydney (April 28, 1994)

Right now I am over somewhere near Cooper Pedy. I am not sure what I am thinking, I seem to be going through various stages of excitement and apprehensiveness. Is Australia still that wonderful country that I have been constantly bragging about for the last twelve months? Will it meet up to my descriptions and expectations? It is going to be like viewing my home city and home country as though I am a tourist. I am looking forward.

Below me, the Australian desert appears as a regular ripple. It is almost as if I were flying over water, or the pattern of ripples that flowing water, or wind, leaves in sand, but obviously at a different scale. In fact, there is no sense of scale. As the sun sets, the horizon becomes deeper and deeper red, moving up through the changes of hue into a deep blue and then finally black. The ripple below me is quickly being swallowed up by a vast darkness. There is one tiny light in the middle of it. The desert sleeps.

I am beginning to look forward to returning to Sydney now. It has been a very satisfying and compact year. The more that I think, the more I realise how much I have achieved...the faraway countries that I have visited, lived in, experienced and recorded and reinterpreted. What an education! And now I hope that I can bring it all back to Australia with me, not necessarily to put into immediate use (some of it may be out of context anyway), but to increase my awareness of what it means to be Australian, and what the Australian landscape actually is. At first, I may very well look at things as an outsider, which could very well be a good thing, that is, to continue my process of observation as I did overseas.

"Kata Tjuta 1"

"From Uluru"

"Kata Tjuta 2"

Aboriginal Australia (May 18, 1994)

I am very fortunate to have been able to fly on to Alice Springs (I did not think that it would be so soon after getting back to Australia), which has led to a trip that has taken in, what is without a doubt, the most inspiring landscape that I have ever seen. And to think that it is all right here in Australia, and that I have still seen only a tiny part of it.

The privilege of actually being out here has brought a lot into perspective for me, especially with respect to what I have been writing about. Most importantly, this trip has highlighted the issue that I find most disturbing in Australia, that is, the difference between Europeans and Australian Aboriginals. As it turns out, although I had knowledge of Aboriginal attitudes towards the land through my final design at university, I did not realise that most of this indifference between black and white is actually to do with varying attitudes towards the treatment and handling of the land. There is so much to learn from this.

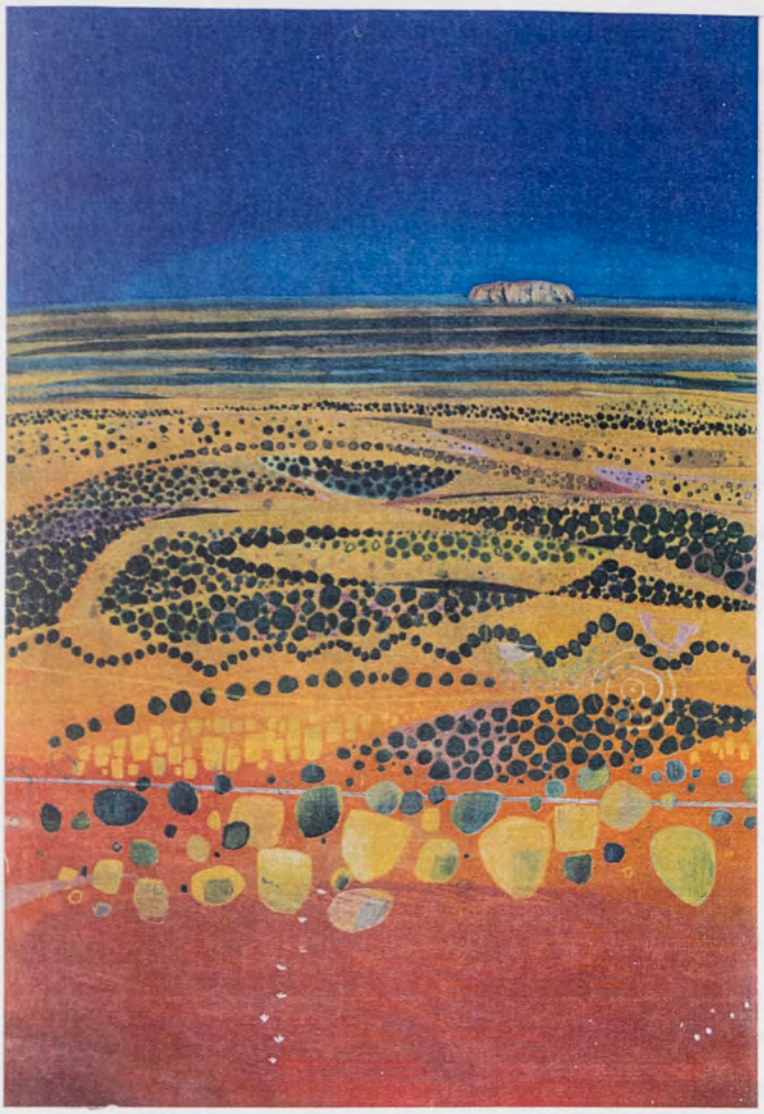
By visiting Uluru I reached a much fuller realisation of attitudes towards the land than I had before. I learnt about aboriginal ways and I discovered their great knowledge of the land resulting from living as a part of the land, rather than as a controller of the land.

I felt hypocritical climbing Uluru. After climbing it I discovered that Aboriginal people do not mind that we climb "the rock", but would prefer that we did not. It is a most sacred site, and they believe that we should be here to learn by listening. So therefore we should not need to climb it (and besides, we are walking up the actual path that the elders have always walked).

Aboriginals note that white man is not satisfied with just looking and taking in a feeling. Just as he must "conquer" the rock (I lost count of how many people I heard shouting, "YES, I made it!" as they made their final steps down the rock), he must also take photographs so that he can take it away with him. He always wants to try to take a piece of something with him. But in doing this, white man forgets to actually observe and to take things in while he is actually there. He forgets to sit there and feel and to listen. He thinks that because he has photographed it, he still has it with him. The aboriginals do not want us to take Uluru away, because this is where it belongs.

This makes me think further. White man, in the quest for knowledge, believes that everything must be understood, cut up, dissected and accurately measured. White man is selfish and wants everything now. Yet, in the end, what is it exactly that we really know? After all, it is white man's attitudes that are destroying the earth.

On the other hand, the aboriginals have lived on the land for at least 40,000 years without effecting it, or to put it in other words, have "touched the land lightly". Through the Dreamtime, the history of



"Raped Sanctuary"

"Why does whiteman have to dissect and accurately measure in order to understand? Why does white man have to take a piece of everything with him? Why does white man have to know everything?"

the land was passed down from generation to generation to ensure that they continued to live in harmony with the land. Hence the aboriginals' nomadic existence. Aboriginals were not only nomadic because of seasonal change, but also so that they would not effect the flora and fauna. That is, the very little that they did effect was then allowed to regenerate. On top of this, they never used more than they needed.

It is interesting to note that different aboriginal tribes did *cross each others paths and that there were clashes (as I was always under the impression that there was not any fighting). But even these clashes were for totally different reasons to what one might expect. They were not simply about control of the land in terms of ownership, but were for how to* look after *the land. Another interesting thing that I discovered was that aboriginals actually had the knowledge to be agricultural, but made a conscious decision not to go in this direction because of the effect that it could have on the land.*

To know what made the law of the land, to be out there to see it and to feel it is what learning about the land is all about.

How can this be applied? (June 9, 1994)

The fact is that now, in Australia, we do have cities, and that these cities are growing. The problem is that they have developed into deserts of nothingness, discontinuous places that lack identity and a sense of place that most unfortunately fails to adequately address environmental issues (and, unlike the deserts of Central Australia, they lack any richness). This is why it is so vital to observe a place, to break it up, to analyse it, and to then apply these ideas. And this self education that I have undergone was a helpful exercise in learning, and learning how to observe places. But how can I put this into use?

The answer may lie in the work that I did for the already mentioned *The Growth of a Town* project. In this design investigation, the most fundamental component was the recognition of the "layers of the land", a process of analysing what a place is really about that provides the clues as to how that place may be developed sensibly in the future. This is a process of recognising the past and the reasons why things are the way they are as a way of directing into the future.

This process must start with the most basic layer of the land, or the "order of nature", which involves the recognition of the natural features of the land. The Aboriginals respected the land, they identified the natural features and responded to them, which, in turn, generated the point of there existence. But when white man came, they renamed places and set up a system of straight lined boundaries to mark ownership, irrespective of what had preceded this, and irrespective of the land itself.

"Mt Connor"

The background of the land should play a role in the planning of a place, and in doing so, addresses environmental issues. Such a planning process will involve the setting up of rules as a framework to ensure that it becomes a reality (and although 'framework' sounds like a rigid word, the natural layers of the land will always interact with this). This will develop into an identifiable town, and the infrastructure is set up in such a way that, regardless of the stage of growth, there is always a definable centre, and always a sense of place. The solution is progressive, where new stages of growth can be added without affecting the basic organisation of the town and the identity is maintained, an identity that originated from the landscape.

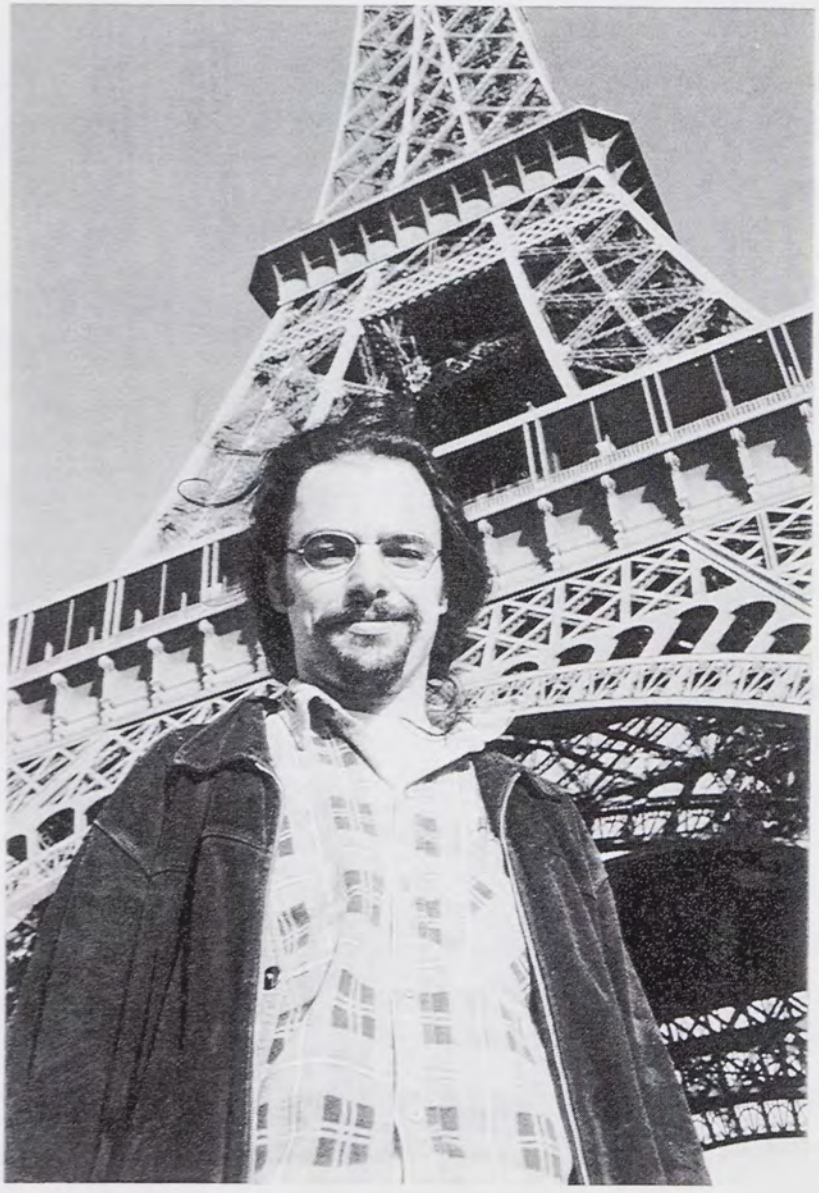
Afterthought

Quite often it is when we are so intent on learning, or being forced *to learn something, that we are actually not learning anything at all. It is when we are out there "in the field", so to speak, when we are actually out there breathing it and feeling it, that we are actually learning. Knowing our limits is also very important - learning is learning at our own pace.*

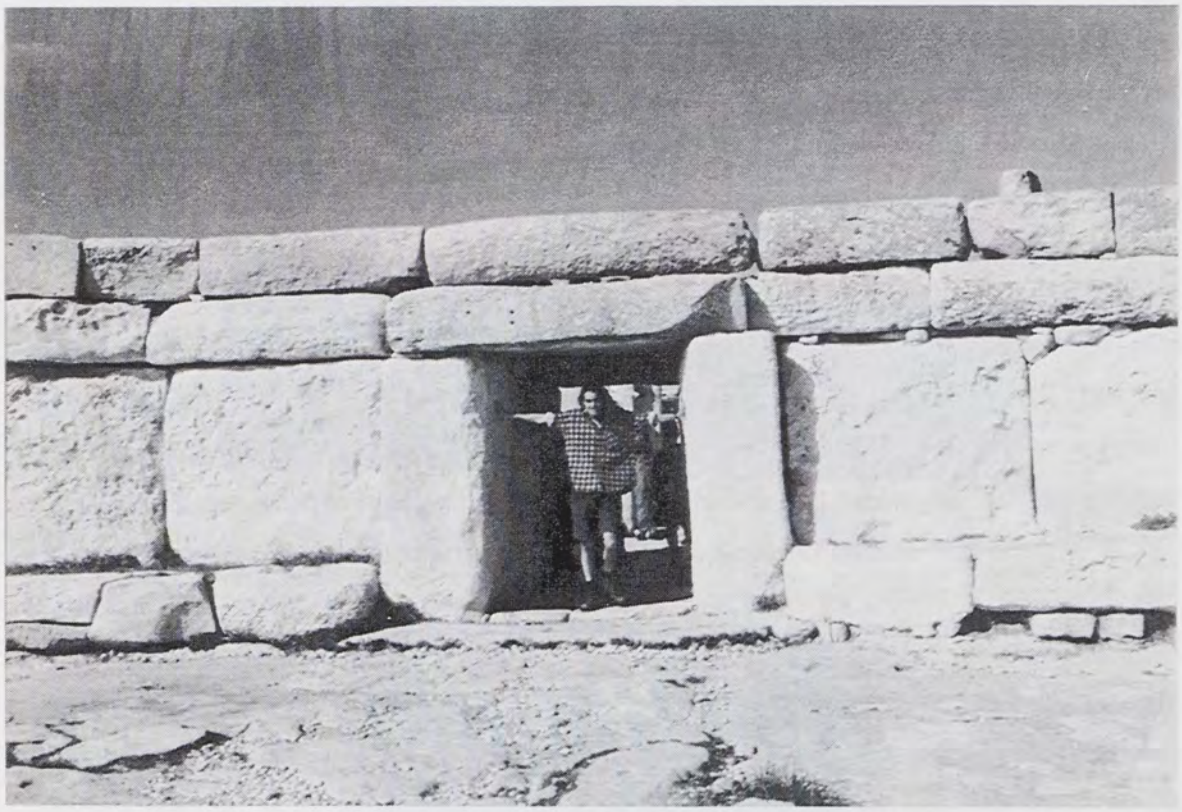
When I look over this paper, it is quite obvious that it has taken a slightly different turn to what was originally presented for the Byera Hadlee Scholarship. In a way, it has further developed as my own ideas have developed. When originally setting out the programme for this paper, I did not know what to expect, but when I look back over what I have done and achieved, I am satisfied with the course I have taken. Just as Brian Eno (a painter turned musician turned record producer) once said that you cannot predict the final outcome of something - it is a matter of putting together a set of things that you have a control over and that will react.

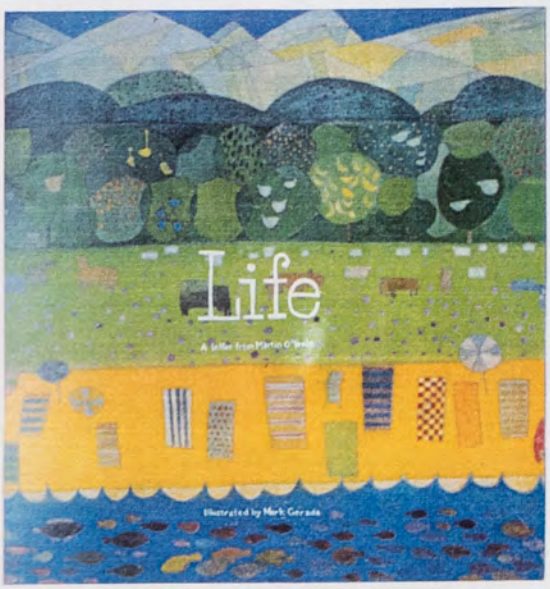
This process has been about probing, expressing and doubting. The ideas developed are based on that process of abstraction, of interpretation and reinterpretation. What is most important is this continual reassessment, and to remember that it is the power of the *idea* that will point the way to the next steps forward.

All of this has helped me to tie my ideas in painting and architecture in together, and has shown me how the two can help each other. It was one thing to write about the links between architecture and painting as I did in my undergraduate dissertation, *From Painting to Theory and Teaching*, but to actually undertake this process, in my own way, was another. It has showed me what I am capable of, and how I can now utilise all of this new found knowledge and ability.



What a fruitful year this was. At the end of university I completed the dissertation and final design which set up an agenda. I then set out to explore new countries, and to read into the reasons why things are the way they are. After continual comparisons with Australia while I was overseas, and my developing awareness as an Australian, I was very fortunate to be able to visit Central Australia and to tie all of my thoughts together (especially after the ideas I developed about ways of reading the landscape, and then to actually see and hear where all of this originated from). And painting was my tool for undertaking this task, it was my way of reading into things. Painting involved a *process* of observing, analysing, breaking things down by way of abstraction, and putting them together in what is hopefully more readable forms...this is my way of learning.




Life
A letter from Martin O'Neill
Illustrated by Mark Gerada

Conclusion

Before I bring this paper to an end, it is important that I make a series of final comments based on the records of my experiences in Europe. These will cover the three major areas of concern - education, painting and architecture.

There has been great debate on the issue of the "synthesis" of art and architecture in recent times, but I feel that there is one point that has not been covered, and that is the importance of self education in art and the inherent benefits for architecture. Throughout this paper I attempted to exemplify some of these benefits by describing my process of painting, what I had to observe in order to achieve a painting, and what I gained from executing a painting. I do not think that there is actually anything new in what I have demonstrated here, however, my explorations reiterate this process (or tradition) that, I believe, must be maintained. I also believe that it is important for one to learn in the most *comfortable*, or natural, environment as possible, which is why I constantly refer to learning from *life*, and all the things that we actually see around us, first hand (rather than from a text book). One is more likely to explore, discover and benefit under such circumstances.

The next issue in question is regarding the relationship between painting and architecture. I believe that the two areas definitely have an effect on each other. More specifically though (in the context of this paper), the question that really has to be asked is, what good is there to be gained in architecture from painting?

At the first level, through the process of painting, one must observe and absorb information before actually executing the painting. Even if this is as simple as sketching, one sees so much more than actually looking or "snapping" away with a camera. Sketching and painting is an education in itself. It is an intensified way of recording and learning about cultures and landscapes, and the resultant buildings. Furthermore, this information is (often subconsciously) used in the *creation* of new architecture.

The second level of benefits in painting is the fact that painting is about creativity. Painting increases ones understanding of form, colour, composition, dynamics, organisation and arrangement. When it comes to this level of thinking, one also has to be realistic about the obvious differences between architecture and painting. Architecture does have its obvious constraints and challenges - there are all sorts of issues, including the most basis fact that there are *other people* involved, and the challenges of turning an idea into something that is real and physical, on top of budgets, project management, quality assurance and fast tracking. This is not to say that there is no time for creativity. It should be in the architect's interest, and their responsibility, to create an interesting and aesthetic built environment. More importantly though, creativity leads to an intelligent and sensitive handling of the components that constitute buildings, towns and cities...and the way they effect the land.

At this second level of thinking it is also important to mention that painting is about the communication of ideas. Keeping in mind that the communication of ideas is also important in architecture, portraying and envisaging built environments before they are a physical reality, in the most true to life fashion is surely of benefit to the building's potential users. But again, one must be aware of the obvious differences between painting and architecture as there is no use being over complicated and abstract in communicating architectural concepts, especially if the client does not understand what the architect's intentions are. Painting in architecture should help to communicate not hinder.

In summing up this issue of the relationship between architecture and painting, it would be fitting to say that painting should be about the stimulation of ideas in an experimental ground that is free and without constraint; a breeding ground for creativity. This new found knowledge can then be applied to other fields.

In terms of my trip to Europe, I did not see going overseas as an opportunity to observe and "copy" but, rather, an opportunity to observe and understand more about the importance of *context*. Being in Europe made me realise what makes Australia. I began to understand what distinguishes Australia as a country and what distinguishes, or made, Australia's architecture (because it was quite obvious where a lot of Australia's architecture originated). As a result of this realisation I was able to pinpoint some of the problems that we do have, and how we can work on these. One thing that concerns me inparticular is the suburbs - the majority of our architecture is in the suburbs, yet very few architects are addressing the situation. In planning for our growing cities we have to start responding to the *land* rather than "developing" in a way that is damaging to the environment.

My way of learning by observing is by painting, and by painting in Europe I took in and realised many new things. Some of these things may not have a lot to do with architecture in Australia, but all of these things made me realise the fundamental differences between my new surrounds in Europe and those I was familiar with in Australia. Making observations overseas also allowed me to see Australia in a new light, and I began to realise what potential Australia has as a country. Australia does have its problems, but on balance it is so much better of than the countries I visited and lived in. Australia *does* have a positive future and architecture *can* play a big part in the way we handle our environment. In the end my learning is more about context. Based on what I saw in Europe, and the effect that European thinking is having on the land in Australia, my most valuable discovery is actually quite simple...we have to stop thinking as Europeans and start thinking as Australians.

Appendix

Different types of housing that I stayed in while overseas.

- 1930's terrace house in Muswell Hill, North London
- Country farmhouse (V. Skerninge) in the Danish countryside
- High-rise student housing in Copenhagen, Denmark
- New housing units in Vejle, Denmark
- Terrace houses (dating from early 1800's) in Malta
- 1950's housing development in Lowestoft, East England
- Early 1900's terrace house in Tooting Bec, South London
- 1950's semi-detached house in Cork City, Ireland
- 1960's town house development in Runcorn, a new city near Liverpool, England
- Late 1800's stone cottage in Slad, Gloucestershire, England
- 1950's semi-detached house in Birmingham, England
- Late 1800's Public House in Muswell Hill, North London

Hotels included

- Hotel Sol, Salamanca, Spain
- Hotel Parador, Salamanca, Spain
- Southampton bed and breakfast, South England
- Swansea bed and breakfast, South Wales
- Tenby bed and breakfast, South Wales
- Hotel Mediteraneo, Lourdes, South France
- Paris bed and breakfast, France

Achievements

- Design of inside cover of a book
- Design and Illustration for a booklet, which was published
- Commissioned to do a painting for the Cardinal of Great Britain
- Design of Christmas cards which were published and all proceeds went to charity
- Exhibition 1 - "Images", held at Tooting Bec, repeated in Muswell Hill
- Exhibition 2 - a two part exhibition - "Images" and "Life & Nature", held at Tooting Bec, repeated in Birmingham and in Muswell Hill
- Paintings exhibited in "Over the Hill", a wine bar/gallery on Alexander Park Road, Muswell Hill
- Paintings exhibited in "The Gallery" and "Framework Gallery", two galleries on the Broadway, Muswell Hill
- Photography for local young musician
- *Life - a letter from Martin O'Toole* - a book based on a letter from a friend dying of AIDS. The book was my concept - I designed it, arranged it, edited it and fully illustrated it. The book is with publishers in London
- Cassette cover for Veronica Towers

Biography used in England.

Mark Gerada was born in Sydney, Australia, in 1968 to a family of Maltese immigrants. He studied architecture at the University of Technology, Sydney, where he graduated with First Class Honours in April 1993. In the six years of this degree he also worked in architectural offices as a designer, worked as a graphic designer for an international design magazine, pursued an interest in photography, and on completion of the architectural course, started his own design business.

For the degree, Mark wrote a thesis titled *From Painting to Theory and Teaching* which explored the process of analysing the true essence of the things about us. This provided an understanding of the most basic structure of painting and how this process can lead to a more direct means of communication.

Although Mark has had a life-long passion to paint, it was not until after graduation that he finally had the opportunity to concentrate his efforts. Winning an architectural travelling scholarship (on the basis of the thesis, which links painting and architecture) only furthered this, bringing Mark to London in May 1993.

The bulk of Mark's painted work interprets the landscapes of his travels around Europe. Central to this work are the paintings that were executed in Malta (a record of Mark's first trip to Malta as a full-blooded Maltese). Not only was there an abundance of subjects to capture on this tiny Mediterranean island, but also an opportunity to capture those things that had been so much a part of the everyday life of his ancestors...the strong forms and colours, limestone buildings, big blue skies, turquoise waters, the grand churches standing proud over clustered villages.

The later works move away from the landscape to more instinctive notions, exploring the ideas that were developed in earlier writings. This includes the "Upward Series" which uses flowers to imply an upward movement of natural spirits. Much of this work was an experiment for a book that Mark is in the process of getting published. Titled *Life*, it illustrates a dying friend's life story.

Mark plans on returning to Sydney for a period to write a paper for the scholarship, to practice architecture, and to further his painting. Future projects include painting the vast landscapes of Central Australia, as well as the Australian bush and coastline. One day he plans on working in a studio in Paris.