

Barbara Brash—
Holding Form



Acknowledgements

Barbara Brash—Holding Form is an exhibition that brings together works from the Geelong Gallery Collection and the Colin Holden Collection of Australian and International prints, of which Geelong Gallery is custodian on behalf of the Colin Holden Charitable Trust.

We are extremely grateful to Moira Eckel, an enthusiastic collector of the works of Barbara Brash, who, in 2017, offered the Gallery the opportunity to select nineteen prints from her extensive holdings. In the same year, the Colin Holden Collection was received by Geelong Gallery, including seven works by Brash collected by historian, author, and curator the late Dr Colin Holden (1951–2016).

This exhibition represents a wonderful confluence of the collecting interests of Moira and Colin, and consolidates Geelong Gallery's distinctive, excellent representation of Australian printmaking. We thank Moira for her gift and her ongoing interest in the legacy of Barbara Brash. I am also grateful to Louise Box, Shane Carmody, and Geoffrey Edwards, Trustees of the Colin Holden Charitable Trust, for their support of and valued commitment to Geelong Gallery and Australian printmaking.

The exhibition also represents the research interests of our former Curatorial Assistant, Deirdre Cannon (now Curatorial Assistant, Australian Art, National Gallery, Canberra). This focussed exhibition brings to our collective attention the work of an important, but not widely known, Australian printmaker Barbara Brash and I thank Deirdre for her insight and research. I also thank our incoming Assistant Curator, Katarina Paseta, for the delivery of final aspects of the exhibition on Deirdre's behalf. Both Deirdre and Katarina have been exceptionally committed to the care, research, and interpretation of the Colin Holden Collection in their respective roles, in addition to the wider print collection.

Holly Fenton, Marketing Coordinator, designed this elegant publication, and I thank members of the Cultural Programming team, led by Lisa Sullivan, Senior Curator, for their contributions to the delivery of the exhibition including Pip Minney, Exhibitions Manager, Veronica Filmer, Registrar & Collection Manager, Emma Crofts, Exhibition Coordinator, and John Stabb, Building & Spaces Coordinator. And I also thank our contract framer Andrew Milne who has prepared the works for exhibition with great expertise.

We are delighted to present this significant exhibition that showcases two very fine print collections, and most importantly, raises the profile of one of Australia's most innovative printmakers, Barbara Brash.

Jason Smith, Director & CEO

Thank you to Barbara Brash's family members Lucinda Brash and Anna Brash, whose remembrances of their aunt and great aunt were valuable to my understanding of her character and practice. My research was also facilitated by Moira Eckel, who generously shared her knowledge of Brash's works.

I am indebted to Emma Mills and the astute scholarship she has undertaken on the artist. Thank you to Ainslie Gowing from the Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, curator of the Cruthers Collection Lee Kinsella, the staff at Australian Galleries and Eastgate Gallery, the Women's Art Archive, Sue Simpson and Dinny Birrell at the Lyceum Club, and Victoria Perin for their shared interest in increasing the awareness of Brash's output. Thank you also to Simon Unterschultz and Karen Macdonald at the National Gallery of Australia Research Library for their generous research assistance.

And finally, my thanks to my former colleagues at Geelong Gallery for their support of the exhibition.

Deirdre Cannon, Exhibition curator

Breaking Ground: Modernist Influences and Innovation in the Prints of Barbara Brash

Deirdre Cannon

In 1965, Barbara Brash held her first solo exhibition at Australian Galleries, a commercial gallery in Melbourne's inner north. An article published in *The Age* newspaper marked the occasion, describing how Brash had converted a domestic laundry mangle into a printing press from which several etchings in the show were produced: 'She enjoyed exploring the possibilities of a medium to the limit of their material' remarked the anonymous author, 'and had been translating all her ideas into this medium so each print was a work in its own right'.¹

Brash's debut solo show was also reviewed by the prominent modernist art critic Alan McCulloch, who offered these words of praise in *The Herald*: 'Barbara Brash has made a notable contribution to the art of print-making in Melbourne. This exhibition shows the reasons why: she is obviously an artist who knows her techniques.'²

Published within a week of each other, these two articles serve as important barometers of Barbara Brash's impact on Australian printmaking. Brash was drawn to the medium as an ideal vehicle for her exploratory practice, the extensive body of work she created between the late 1940s up until her death in 1998 revealing an approach grounded in the translation of diverse artistic principles and ideas into print. Furthermore, the array of technical processes used to realise her ambitious, experimental

works demonstrates her abiding interest in pushing past established aesthetic and material boundaries. In doing so, Brash forged new entry points for the appreciation and understanding of printmaking within Australian art history.

Brash undertook her training at leading Melbourne institutions of the post-war era, namely the National Gallery School, George Bell School, and the Melbourne Technical College print room. Her artistic trajectory was shaped by a range of creative attitudes she encountered during this time, chief among them the extension of modern art known as classical modernism which was championed in Australia by the influential artist and founder of the eponymous art school, George Bell. An increased institutional and commercial interest in printmaking coincided with Brash's early education, and her career as a professional artist blossomed during a period that engendered the dissolution of distinctions between design and 'high' art, as well as a shift toward increasingly non-representational and abstracted approaches to image making.

Importantly, Brash was part of a community of students who received overlapping instruction at the Gallery School, Bell School, and Technical College. This essay will consider how these institutions shaped Brash's artistic development, and examine how the tenets of her training were synthesized

into her own modernist language. Although her work remains understudied in comparison to other artists in her cohort, Brash's works are important vestiges of Australian modernism, illuminating how she forged a unique means of expression by integrating new visual and pictorial dynamics with innovative printmaking processes.



Cat. no. 1

Barbara Brash
(attributed to) (*Suburban streetscape*) c. 1950



Cat. no. 3

Barbara Brash
Head 1956

Barbara Nancy Brash was born in Melbourne in 1925, the first daughter of Elsa and Alfred Brash. The Brash family were well known in Melbourne as the music retailers that founded 'Brashes' in the late 1890s, a business which would expand to selling whitegoods in the 1950s. Barbara attended secondary school at the all-girls college St. Catherine's in the affluent suburb of Toorak, and her presence at parties and events was occasionally reported in the social pages of Melbourne's newspapers.

Her artistic inclinations may be attributed to both sides of her family, the artist stating '[m]y mother had been to the Slade School in London and painted miniatures – so did her sister. After leaving school I thought I would try commercial art.'³ On Brash's father's side, a connection to the Australian Impressionist movement can be traced. Her great aunt Golda Figa Brasch married Louis Abrahams, founding member of the Heidelberg School, in 1888. In about 1890 Barbara's great uncle Reuben Brasch established the Curlew Camp at Sirius Cove in the Sydney suburb of Mosman and invited a colony of artists and creatives to live and work in the coastal bush. Here, Arthur Streeton, Tom Roberts, and Louis Abrahams worked on paintings *en plein air* that depict the camp's idyllic natural setting.⁴ The long wooden panels that Streeton used in many of his Sydney works may also have been provided by Reuben Brasch.

Lastly, another of Barbara's great aunts, Selina Venus Brasch, was a model for Tom Roberts and a regular attendee of Roberts's and Streeton's fortnightly 'Studio Thursdays' in Sydney.⁵ Her likeness can be seen in paintings such as *Portrait Study of Lena Brasch* 1893 and *An Eastern Princess* 1893.⁶

Brash began her artistic education at the Melbourne Technical College in 1945, completing one year of a Commercial Art diploma before switching to the National Gallery School the following year.⁷ She joined the Gallery School at a time of upheaval and critical staffing changes that would signal the advent of modernist influence in Melbourne's leading artistic academy. As the newly appointed head, William Dargie issued a report urging radical changes to the School's curriculum, and in April 1947 he reported to the board of trustees that students were demanding a more diversified approach to artistic training. Three streams were created in response to this appeal. They were taught by Dargie, drawing master Murray Griffin and Alan Sumner, the latter a new appointment who is recognised as the first modernist artist to occupy a teaching position at the Gallery School. Brash, along with her childhood friend and fellow artist Dorothy Braund, became part of the group of students who studied painting with Sumner, known as 'Sumner's kids'.⁸ Then located in the State Library of Victoria building, painting

instruction for the School took place in a long, light bathed studio overlooking Little Lonsdale Street in the centre of Melbourne.⁹ During this period, the School's curriculum consisted of a year of traditional exercises in drawing and painting, followed by a final two years of independent production.¹⁰

Sumner, a multidisciplinary artist known primarily for his work in stained glass, also produced screenprints throughout the 1940s and '50s. Screenprinting was a technique largely associated with commercial activity and advertising at the time, and it was potentially in seeing Sumner's first exhibition of screenprints at Georges' Gallery on Collins Street in 1946¹¹ that Brash first encountered the technique in a fine art context. As George Bell noted in his introduction to the exhibition, screenprinting was a process 'hitherto unknown in Australia' and Sumner's handling of the inks and stencils were 'of rare quality and every bit as vital and clear in colour' as a painting.¹² Though it would take Brash until the mid-1950s to start producing screenprints of her own, the influence of Sumner's polychromatic designs can be detected early on in her burgeoning visual language.



Fig.no. 3

Alan Sumner
Cyclists near Geelong c. 1944
 colour screenprint
 Geelong Gallery
 Gift of Cheetham Salt, 1983
 Reproduced with the permission of Dr Peter D. Meier



Barbara Wright
 Figure, 1950
 Oil on canvas
 10 1/2 x 14 1/2 inches
 Gift of the artist to the University of California, Los Angeles

Barbara Wright
 Self-Portrait, 1950
 Oil on canvas
 10 1/2 x 14 1/2 inches
 Gift of the artist to the University of California, Los Angeles



Since the late 1930s, the ideas and practices of modern art had begun to assert their influence on the creative milieus of Melbourne. A major turning point in the widespread appreciation of modern art was the opening of the *Exhibition of French and British Contemporary Art* held at the Melbourne Town Hall in October 1939. An estimated audience of 45,000 visitors turned out to see works by Picasso, Matisse and Braque, among others that, aside from reproductions, had never before been seen in the country. This blockbuster exhibition was preceded by the inaugural Contemporary Art Society Exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in June of the same year, its high proportion of non-representational and Cubist-inspired works by local artists prompting one critic to determine that '[o]ne thing the exhibition would seem to clearly demonstrate is that, as far as Melbourne is concerned, the cult of the modernist is a force to be reckoned with ...'.¹³

At the head of this movement in academic circles was artist and teacher George Bell, whose studios in Bourke Street and Selbourne Road in Toorak were vital pedagogical settings that hosted some of the most fêted artists from the inter and post-war years. As a previous student of Bell, Sumner encouraged his students to attend classes with the senior artist as a way of extending their education and

experimenting with different media, and it was at the George Bell School that Brash was further immersed in the broader philosophy of modern art.

Brash had completed most of her first year at the Gallery School before deciding to supplement her nascent modernist training at Bell's. She was part of a group of friends including Dorothy Braund, Michael Shannon and Mary Macqueen that would finish their Friday Gallery School classes with Sumner and travel down St Kilda Road to Bell's studio; Braund remembering that she and Brash would attend 'Friday afternoon classes at George Bell's studio and [come] home on the same tram together'.¹⁴

Bell's teachings emphasised composition as an essential criterion for art making, citing the work of French post-Impressionist painter Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) as a prime example of how artists should aim to order their material, infuse it with an idea and impart rhythm to its structure.¹⁵ His ideas were also guided by the timeless qualities of art from the early Renaissance, epitomised for Bell in the compositional balance, delicate use of colour and attention to geometry in works by artists such as Piero della Francesca (c. 1416–1492). By concentrating on the formal aspects of works by these predecessors, he impressed upon his students that modernism was essentially a return

to the ideas of formal design or 'true classicism', and the enduring importance of structure in artistic expression.¹⁶ In his own practice, this is illustrated in works such as *Girl resting* 1930s (fig. no. 1). This closely cropped composition displays Bell's use of artistic invention in its distillation of the figure to essential forms (oval head, cylindrical arms, knuckles and shoulder suggested by minimal contouring), and its variegated palette which draws attention to the materials and process of its creation. This approach was encouraged by Bell; he advocated for imaginative and intelligent expressions of subject matter and stressed the importance of formal arrangement in achieving harmonious artistic designs for the modern era.



Fig. no. 1

George Bell
Girl resting 1930s
 oil on composition board
 Geelong Gallery
 Gift of the artist's daughter, Antoinette Niven, 1997
 © Courtesy of the artist's estate

From Bell, Brash inherited the principle of dynamic symmetry: the mathematical division of pictorial space into a grid of rectangles and intersecting diagonal lines designed to promote flow between the elements of a composition. The shape and feel generated by dynamic symmetry, also referred to as the Golden Rule or Golden Section, is a defining characteristic of many of Brash's prints from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, imparting an aesthetically pleasing but structured arrangement to her compositions as they veered increasingly toward the abstract realm. In *Seated woman* c. 1955 (cat. no. 2), the eye is drawn up from the sole of the figure's foot at the bottom right, creating diagonal tension through the curved hem of her dress, the floating overlay of the pink stencil and arcing around into her elbow, shoulder, and hair. By contrast, the effect of dynamic symmetry on the spatial arrangement of *House* c. 1958 (cat. no. 4) is perceptible in its division both vertically and horizontally into a series of recurring rectangles with the use of shadow and structural outlines, symmetry and asymmetry combining harmoniously throughout the image.



Cat. no. 2
Barbara Brash
Seated woman c. 1955



Cat. no. 4
Barbara Brash
House c. 1958

From the mid-1940s, the flow of students between the Gallery School and George Bell's studio represented a new generation of artists who weren't trained to emulate local landscape and Impressionist traditions that had been the focus of Australian artistic production for the last 50 years. They regarded modern art with equanimity, as a baseline from which further artistic explorations could take place.¹⁷ Brash herself confirms the ideological continuity between the two instructors: 'I spent two years with Bell ... and found no conflict with Sumner's teaching. Bell made us appreciate bone structure and the twist on the form. He encouraged me to think of art structure as like a piece of engineering. He emphasised the elements and principles of design'.¹⁸ Braund concurred with the sympathetic instruction received from Sumner and Bell, recalling that '[t]hey were drumming Cézanne into us and of course all the other great masters, ancient and modern'.¹⁹

An interest in graphic and applied arts was a natural extension of Bell's belief in design, and whilst he never taught printmaking, he encouraged many of his students to experiment with the medium from the 1930s. Bell did, however, create linocuts sporadically from the 1920s, the technique a sympathetic

medium that could yield imagery that mirrored his desire for the simplification of form. As his previous student Eric Thake remembers, '[s]implification was his big war cry. He always used to tell us to paint like a poster, to simplify the tones'.²⁰ Part of Bell's attraction towards printed designs was their ability to extend art into the wider community. Taking everyday subject matter as his inspiration, his humorous linocut *Stretch nylon exhibition* 1945–66 (fig. no. 2), disseminated by the artist as a Christmas card to friends, is an example of how he sought to democratise the experience of art, 'bringing art within the reach of all'²¹, and 'breaking through that aloof and remote atmosphere with which art is encircled'.²²



Fig. no. 2

George Bell
Stretch nylon exhibition 1945–66
 linocut
 Geelong Gallery
 Bequest of Mrs Yvonne Pettengell, 2012
 © Courtesy of the artist's estate

From the late 1940s to the mid-1960s, a renewed passion for printmaking spread throughout Melbourne's art schools, galleries and ateliers. This enthusiasm was partly due to émigré artists such as Eva Kubbos and returning expatriates like Franz Kempf arriving in the city and sharing their European training in printmaking with eager Australian practitioners. Local established artists are also to be credited for this groundswell, among them Ben Croskell who was key to the revival of etching as a contemporary fine art practice.²³ Croskell, who studied with the prominent Australian etcher John Shirlow, began teaching Saturday morning etching classes at the Technical College in 1948, and it was in these lessons that Brash experienced her first foray into printmaking. Brash's memory of this nexus in her career is indicative of the limited knowledge of printmaking among art students of the time, and conversely the seemingly organic dissemination of its techniques throughout her peers. When asked what compelled her to try etching in the first instance, she stated 'I don't know. I didn't know anything about it. Somebody said my drawings ... looked like an etching and I didn't know what an etching was.'²⁴

These classes would be the beginning of the artist's long association with the Technical College and the wide network

of artists that made work therein. Brash returned to Melbourne in 1951 from a trip to Europe that she took with Dorothy Braund, frequenting the Tech again from 1952 to attend weekly Tuesday group evening classes with Harold Freedman. These classes, which took place out of hours and were offered on an invite-only basis, became a focal point for the city's experimental printmaking production. Here Brash became a skilled, respected participant in what are remembered as vibrant and stimulating gatherings, with subsequent head of the printmaking department Tate Adams describing them as 'alive with activity'.²⁵

The technical assistance and availability of specialist materials like etching presses, inks, zinc plates and lithographic stones in these sessions attracted the participation of some of the most celebrated post-war Australian artists, such as Hertha Kluge-Pott, George Baldessin and Janet Dawson, who were similarly keen to experiment in print and expand their knowledge of its processes. Among the core group associated with the classes and output of the Technical College print room were women artists, Brash forming friendships with and exhibiting alongside Mary Macqueen, Nancy Clifton, Lesbia Thorpe, and Christine Aldor into the 1960s.²⁶ It was within this porous and experimental milieu, with the backing of Bell's formal

and design sensibility, that Brash's individual modernist vernacular would take full flight.



Barbara Brash and Dorothy Braund, overseas travel, 1950–51, photographer unknown, courtesy of the Lyceum Club Melbourne



Barbara Brash and Dorothy Braund, overseas travel, 1950–51, photographer unknown, courtesy of the Lyceum Club Melbourne



Barbara Brash
40 prints by ten artists (with Native dancer) 1954
 National Gallery of Victoria
 Gift from the Estate of Barbara Brash 2002

Brash exhibited regularly in galleries across Australia during the 1950s and '60s. Her works appeared in numerous exhibitions at the Peter Bray Gallery and Victorian Artists' Society Galleries, most often in the company of the various art printmaking collectives with which she was associated: the Freedman Group, Studio One Printmakers, and George Bell's Contemporary Artists Society. Her work received positive critical attention, reviews from the time praising her feel for 'planning, texture and harmony',²⁷ ability to devise 'radiating compositions',²⁸ and 'superb formal and tonal control'.²⁹ Brash continued to work from the Technical College for several years, producing linocuts, etchings, and lithographs from 1953, and screenprints from 1959.

Screenprints are a hallmark of Brash's mature practice, with her avid interest in the technique reflective of its growing popularity in fine art circles. As she recalls, screenprinting was taught in the textile design course, and 'they didn't have the equipment for artists' at the time she created her first screenprint in 1959.³⁰

As suggested above, it was potentially the prints created by her former National Gallery School instructor Alan Sumner—together with her year of commercial training and a natural exposure to the activities taking place in the Tech's design department—that first drew

Brash to the creative potential of screenprinting. Indeed, one of her early paintings was deemed to share synergies with the technique, with critic Alan McCulloch noting that her contribution to the 1953 George Bell Group Exhibition, *Woman seated* 1953, 'has the forthright quality of a vividly stencilled fabric design'.³¹



Barbara Brash
Design for record cover Brash's for records c. 1955
 gouache
 National Gallery of Victoria
 Gift from the Estate of Barbara Brash, 2002

If Sumner is to be credited with elevating the technique to the realm of fine art with his use of carefully graded inks and producing a controlled painterly effect in print (see for example *Cyclists near Geelong* c. 1944 (fig. no. 3)), Brash's screenprints should be recognised for propelling it into complex aesthetic and technical territory. Her works employ colour to its full effect, freely combining areas of rich, tonal washes with solid hued planes. Additionally, by varying the degrees of transparency and manipulating the register, or the way printed elements aligned within her compositions, she exploited the chromatic and textural possibilities that could be achieved. In *Sea fringe* 1963 (cat. no. 7) for example, the optical effect of a mirage is produced through Brash's use of multiple screens to build up a diffused and gauze-like effect. The washi, or Japanese paper, selected for the support lends a delicacy and sheen to the inks applied, and a gently rippled ocean surface is suggested by intersplicing sections of yellow, greys, and blues. Bold colours are laid over this background: blue and orange orbs, a mountainous form, a distorted grey reflection, and abstract accents sweeping the imagery into a cohesive scene. Brash maintained the choice of colour in this work was intuitive: 'the paper itself seemed to suggest the colour I used',³² with the effect of fading but brilliant sunlight hitting water further enhanced by the tapering slice of orange and yellow approaching into the seascape from the bottom left.



Cat. no. 7
Barbara Brash
Sea fringe 1963

(Details at right)



From the 1970s the process of screenprinting would become associated with political activism, social and artistic collectives recognising that the technique allowed them to easily and effectively produce eye-catching posters to convey their ideas. Throughout this time the subject matter of Brash's works remained apolitical, however, and the way in which she adapted the technique to render mutable and nuanced effects in print can be seen in opposition to the provocative and direct imagery these groups aimed for. As Moira Eckel, donor of several key Brash works to Geelong Gallery has observed, Brash 'clearly wanted to avoid the poster look'.³³ This is particularly true of works from the late 1950s. Prints such as *Landscape* c. 1959 (cat. no. 5) are notable for their uneven border lines, Brash purposefully designing screens that allowed planes of colour to overlap organically into the margins of the sheet. Her use of vignetting, a term that describes the application of non-rectilinear borders to an image, definitively sets *Landscape* apart from etching and other intaglio processes, which are characterised by the impression of the rectangular plate pressed into the paper during printing.³⁴

A turning point in Brash's screenprint production occurred in 1963 when she moved out of her family home into a house of her own, a decision that would also correspond with her gradual withdrawal from the exhibiting and studio collectives in which she had previously played active roles. From her new home studio at 735 Toorak Road, Kooyong, she continued to apply the skills and techniques gained over the past decade, adapting them to achieve heightened formal and textural effects in the context of her increasingly experimental practice. As described at the beginning of this essay, Brash acquired a converted mangle which allowed her to test new ways of printing on her own terms, although by her own admission it failed to yield a consistently suitable finish as the rollers didn't apply enough pressure as the printing bed passed through.³⁵ She also either made or commissioned custom screenprinting stencils in larger and unconventional formats, and began creating works in a distinctive vertical banner format.³⁶ Brash explained that those who studied at the Technical College had previously been content to produce conventionally sized work, but that the artist Daryl Lindsay attacked the increase in scale adopted throughout the group, advocating for a return to printmaking's intimately scaled origins '[j]ust as we were getting a bit bigger'.³⁷



Cat. no. 5
Barbara Brash
Landscape c. 1959

Alongside the advancement of the size and format of her screenprints, the simplified forms, independent colour and clarified drawing of Brash's classical modernist education continued to be articulated through her work. Flowing, balanced compositions and imaginative interpretations of subject matter illustrate her ongoing commitment to pursuing an idiosyncratic style with which she could record her observations of the natural world. In particular, the vaulted triangle form that appears throughout many of her works emerges as a key element that serves varying compositional functions in her modernist idiom. As described above, this device is used as an accent in *Sea fringe*, drawing the eye in a circular motion and establishing a visual relationship between the angular mountain form and its reflected counterpart below. In Brash's 1965 series *Birds of Australia, New Guinea and the World*, it is rotated 90 degrees to describe the physiognomy of birds perched on branches and the drape and texture of extravagant plumage (*Turquoise-browed Motmot* (*Eumomota superciliosa*) 1965, (cat. no. 10)). Inverted, this form also indicates the flurry of a pair of wings taking flight (*Red-plumed and blue Birds of Paradise* (*Paradisra raggiana* and *Paradisornis rudolphi*), 1965, (cat. no 9)).



Cat. no. 10
Barbara Brash
Turquoise-browed Motmot (*Eumomota superciliosa*) 1965



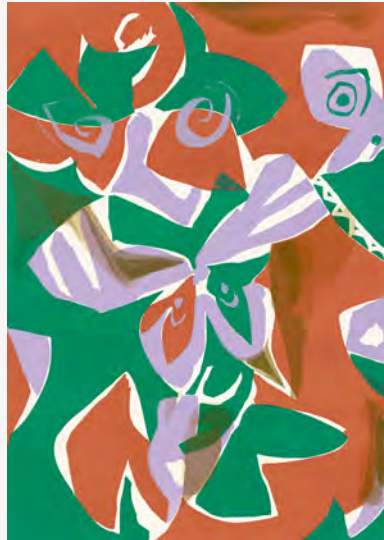
Cat. no. 9
Barbara Brash
Red-plumed and Blue Birds of Paradise (*Paradisra raggiana* and *Paradisornis rudolphi*) 1965



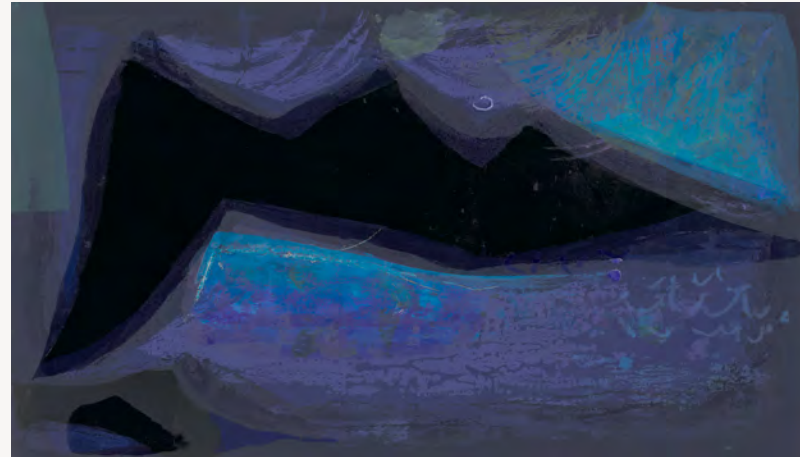
Cat. no. 8
Barbara Brash
The Stumpy Gully fire-brigade breaks down on the way to Moomba c. 1963

Furthermore, works produced right up to the very end of her career demonstrate the absorption of the larger Bell philosophy that art should bring out the intrinsic essence of objects and subject matter, and explore the relationships and arrangements of colour and shape. This is illustrated in one of Brash's most virtuosic non-figurative prints, *The Stumpy Gully fire-brigade breaks down on the way to Moomba* c. 1963 (cat. no. 8). Here, the drama and chaos of a vehicular mishap is translated into an asterisk, spiral, exclamation points and intuitive mark making. To achieve the effects of immediacy and gesture she desired, Brash used a resist process similar to that used in lithography that allows a design to be drawn directly onto the mesh of the screen using a grease-based ink.³⁸ Colour is used abstractly, a rough bullseye built up in brown, pink and orange in the centre of the sheet to pinpoint the nexus of the action; a verge of highway grass indicated by a khaki green zigzag in the bottom right. The graphic sweeps placed throughout are typical indexes of Brash's exemplary handling of line and spatial understanding, whipping an otherwise disparate grouping of characters into a scene that can be understood in terms of its relational and atmospheric qualities.

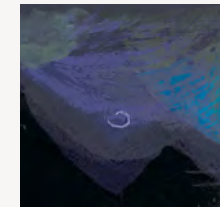
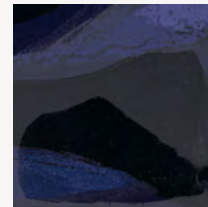
Among the most inventive of her methods was her pioneering use of thermography: a process, like screenprinting, which was primarily associated with commercial printing output at the time Brash started to experiment with it. Achieving an effect similar to embossing, thermography involves the application of ink that has been mixed with powdered resin to damp paper, which is then heated to create raised and glassy areas on the surface. Brash used this process to add interest and texture in a number of screenprints from the mid-1960s, including *Butterflies II* c. 1971 (cat. no. 17). Arranged in closely set wavy lines that create what is known as a moiré pattern, the thermographed additions mimic how the eye perceives the rapid beating of butterfly wings. In *Promontory* c. 1967 (cat. no. 13), thermographed sections are found throughout the mysterious geographic volume and its surrounding body of water. Combining numerous screens and the painterly use of ink, including scraped back incursions that reveal both the un-inked support and underlying colours, *Promontory*'s thermography adds even more textural interest to what is an already visually rich and technically complex work.



Cat. no.
Barbara Brash
Butterflies II c. 1971
(Detail at right)

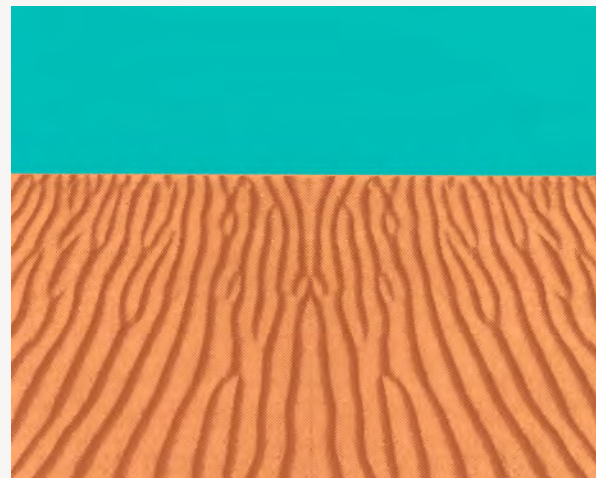


Cat. no. 13
Barbara Brash
Promontory c. 1967
(Details at right)



In the 1970s and '80s Brash completed several works that engaged with hard-edge abstraction and colour field painting, her adaption of these international styles into print signalling her interest in broader artistic currents. Through exhibitions like *The Field*, held at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1968 and which Brash would have been well aware of as an artist living and working in Melbourne, she came into direct contact with contemporary Australian expressions of these movements.³⁹ Screenprinting is well suited to these styles due to its clearly defined edges and high saturation of monochromatic colour achieved by the firm sweeping movement required to push ink through the fine mesh of stencilled silkscreens. In *Ice* 1978 (cat. no. 19), Brash enhances the high contrast of a deep navy background and white foreground with precisely registered gradients in shades of blue, purple and yellow. Similarly, the flat plane of turquoise sky in *Desert II* 1982 (cat. no. 20) is offset by a mirror image of rippled sand dunes created using the photomechanical screenprinting technique. Their gentle ridges are formed by halftone dots which have been embedded into the screen using a photographic emulsion and exposing images onto it using UV light. The minimalist inflection and restraint of this work is unprecedented in Brash's output.

Throughout the diverse subject matter and technical shifts that Brash drew into her artistic orbit, her desire to find new ways to enhance the aesthetic and material possibilities of the printed medium remained constant. Coming of age as an artist during Australia's printmaking revival, Brash's sustained experimentation with the medium's processes and finishes expanded established print practice as it was known in Australia. The body of work she created over 50 years is an important record of the influx of the new artistic principles and attitudes that shaped post-war art production. Brash's education at three of Melbourne's most instrumental art institutions provided her a robust grounding in classical modernist precepts including an emphasis on balanced designs, intelligent distillations of form and relationships of figures and space. In her mature practice she leveraged these artistic foundations to realise even more individualistic and innovative compositions, which are celebrated now, as they were contemporaneously at the time of their creation, for their celebratory use of colour and inventive abstraction. By challenging the printed medium to bear her own pictorial and sensorial vision, Brash created some of the most exciting and innovative works of her generation.



Cat. no. 20

Barbara Brash
Desert II 1982

(Detail at right)



Endnotes

1 'Mangle becomes printing press', *The Age*, June 9 1965.

2 Alan McCulloch, *The Herald*, June 16 1965.

3 Mary Eagle and Jan Minchin, *The George Bell School: Students, Friends, Influences*, Deutscher Art, Melbourne, 1981, p. 236.

4 See for example Arthur Streeton, *Sirius Cove* c. 1895, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, and Tom Roberts, *The camp, Sirius Cove* 1899, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.

5 Mary Eagle, *The Oil Paintings of Tom Roberts in the National Gallery of Australia*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 1997, p. 61.

6 Both held in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

7 Sarah Thomas, 'In print out of fashion: Women artists and printmaking 1950–64', *Art and Australia*, no. 72, 1995, p. 376.

8 Eagle and Minchin, p. 132.

9 Jacqueline Macnaughtan, 'From life: works by early generations of students at the National Gallery Art School', Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, 2004, p. 6. Quoted at <https://blogs.unimelb.edu.au/librarycollections/2018/10/02/daub-1947-1948-and-1949-the-magazine-produced-by-students-of-the-national-gallery-of-art-school/>. Accessed 14 June 2021.

10 Geoff Hannon, *Dorothy Braund Retrospective* (exh. cat.), Castlemaine Art Gallery and Historical Museum, Castlemaine, 2006, p. 9.

11 James Gleeson interviews: Alan Sumner, 28 November 1978. URL: <https://nga.gov.au/media/dd/documents/sumner.pdf>. Accessed 14 June 2021.

12 George Bell, *Alan Sumner Exhibition of Screenprints* (exh. cat.), Georges' Gallery, Melbourne, 1946. Quoted in Roger Butler, *Alan Sumner Screenprints*, Eastgate Gallery, Armadale, 1993, p. 11.

13 'Contemporary Art: Important Exhibition', *The Age*, 6 June 1939, p. 7.

14 *Barbara Brash* (exh. cat.), Eastgate Galleries, Armadale, 1989, n.p.

15 Felicity St John Moore, *Classical Modernism: The George Bell Circle*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 1992, p. 34.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

17 Eagle and Minchin, p. 133.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 236.

19 Hannon, p. 10.

20 Eagle and Minchin, p. 21.

21 St John Moore, p. 129.

22 'Art is too respectable', *The Courier*, 10 February 1949. Quoted in Butler, p. 13.

23 Emma Mills, *A woman not watched: the life and work of Barbara Brash*, unpublished Honours thesis, University of Melbourne, 2019, p. 15.

24 Barbara Brash interviewed by Rosanna Hindmarsh, 17 August 1992, transcript, Hindmarsh papers, MS 152 Roger Butler Australian Prints & Printmaking Research Files, National Gallery of Australia Research Library and Archive, Canberra.

25 Tate Adams' speech 'Melbourne printmaking in the 1960's', given at *The Second Australian Print Symposium in Canberra*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, 1992. URL: <http://www.printsandprintmaking.gov.au/references/1300/>

26 These relationships were explored in the exhibition *From Tuesday to Tuesday: Barbara Brash, Nancy Clifton, Mary Macqueen, Lesbia Thorpe*, Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, 2006, curated by Ainsley Gowing.

27 Arnold Shore, 'Design is featured in artists' work', *The Argus*, 23 October 1956, p. 15.

28 'Melbourne prints 1960 stimulating', *Canberra Times*, 28 May 1960, p. 2.

29 'Art notes', *The Age*, 16 June 1965.

30 Barbara Brash interviewed by Rosanna Hindmarsh.

31 Alan McCulloch, 'Ideas are important', *The Herald*, 24 November 1954, p. 22.

32 'The work of art', *The Sun*, 12 September 1963.

33 Moira Eckel in conversation with the author, 15 January 2021.

34 Butler, p. 12.

35 Barbara Brash interviewed by Rosanna Hindmarsh.

36 See for example *Potplant* 1960s, in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. This work measures 97.8 x 30.3 cm.

37 Barbara Brash interviewed by Rosanna Hindmarsh.

38 Mills, p. 21.

39 Brash's engagement with the hard-edge movement and the resonances her practice shared with work associated with *The Field* was acknowledged at an institutional level, with her work included in the exhibition *The Field Revisited 1968–1988*, Centre Gallery, Queensland, 1988.



Robert Rauschenberg
Purple and Red, 1965
Oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm
Gift of the artist to the Museum of Modern Art, 1965
Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY

Robert Rauschenberg
Green and Red, 1965
Oil on canvas, 100 x 100 cm
Gift of the artist to the Museum of Modern Art, 1965
Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY



Illustrated checklist



Cat. no. 1

Barbara Brash
(attributed to) (*Suburban streetscape*) c. 1950
coloured linocut
sheet and image 12.8 x 16.3 cm
Colin Holden Charitable Trust
© the estate of the artist



Cat. no. 2

Barbara Brash
Seated woman c. 1955
colour lithograph; edition of 20
image 34.5 x 27.2 cm; sheet 50.8 x 37.0 cm
Geelong Gallery
Gift of Moira Eckel through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2017
© the estate of the artist



Cat. no. 3

Barbara Brash
Head 1956
 colour lithograph; edition of 15
 image 24.4 x 31.6 cm; sheet 38.1 x 49.8 cm
 Geelong Gallery
 Gift of Moira Eckel through the Australian
 Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2017
 © the estate of the artist



Cat. no. 4

Barbara Brash
House c. 1958
 colour screenprint; edition of 25
 image 54.0 x 58.5 cm; sheet 70.1 x 77.3 cm
 Geelong Gallery
 Gift of Moira Eckel through the Australian
 Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2017
 © the estate of the artist



Cat. no. 5

Barbara Brash
Landscape c. 1959
 colour screenprint; edition of 25
 image 54.0 x 58.5 cm; sheet 70.1 x 77.3 cm
 Geelong Gallery
 Gift of Moira Eckel through the Australian
 Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2017
 © the estate of the artist



Cat. no. 6

Barbara Brash
Cliff foliage c. 1962
 colour linocut; edition of 35
 image 32.8 x 40.0 cm; sheet 38.2 x 56.0 cm
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 Gift of Moira Eckel through the Australian
 Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2017
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Cat. no. 7

Barbara Brash
Sea fringe 1963

colour screenprint on Japanese paper; edition of 40
 image 48.3 x 39.4 cm; sheet 63.0 x 48.4 cm

Geelong Gallery

Gift of Moira Eckel through the Australian
 Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2017

© the estate of the artist



Cat. no. 8

Barbara Brash
The Stumpy Gully fire-brigade breaks down on the way to Moomba c. 1963
 colour screenprint
 image 48.7 x 67.2 cm; sheet 63.5 x 93.8 cm
 Geelong Gallery
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Cat. no. 9

Barbara Brash
Red-plumed and blue birds of paradise (Paradisara raggiana and Paradisornis rudolphi) 1965
 colour screenprint; edition 6/25; from the 'Birds of Australia, New Guinea and the World' series
 image 31.4 x 26.1 cm; sheet 56.0 x 37.8 cm
 Colin Holden Charitable Trust
 © the estate of the artist



Cat. no. 10

Barbara Brash
Turquoise-browed motmot (Eumomota superciliosa) 1965
 colour screenprint; edition 29/40; from the 'Birds of Australia, New Guinea and the World' series
 image 32.0 x 24.3 cm; sheet 55.6 x 37.9 cm
 Geelong Gallery
 Gift of Moira Eckel through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2017
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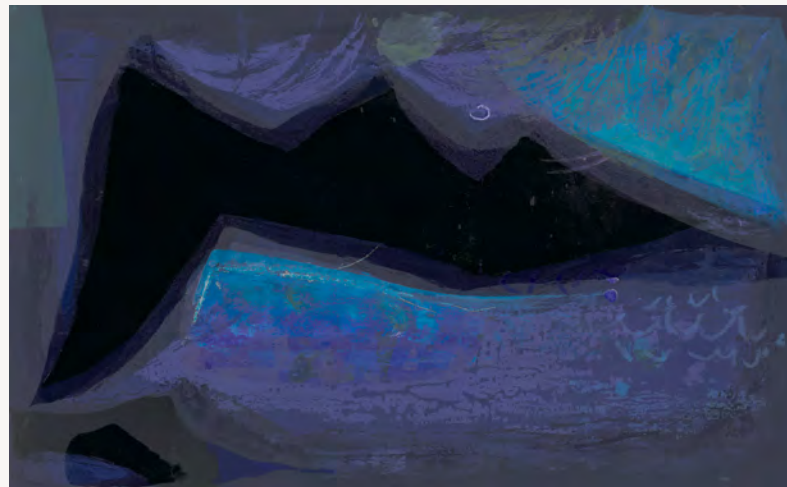
Cat. no. 11

Barbara Brash
Twelve-wired birds of paradise (Parotia sefilata). Six-plumed birds of paradise (Selevucidis melanoleucus) 1965
 colour screenprint; edition of 40; from the 'Birds of Australia, New Guinea and the World' series
 image 32.7 x 21.5 cm; sheet 56.1 x 38.0 cm
 Geelong Gallery
 Gift of Moira Eckel through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2017
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Cat. no. 12

Barbara Brash
White-backed magpie (*Gymnorhina hypoleuca*) 1965
 colour screenprint; edition of 35; from the 'Birds of Australia, New Guinea and the World' series
 image 31.2 x 26.2 cm; sheet 55.6 x 38.2 cm
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Cat. no. 13

Barbara Brash
Promontory c. 1967
 thermograph and colour screenprint; edition of 18
 image 38.2 x 63.7 cm; sheet 57.0 x 78 .0 cm
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 Gift of Moira Eckel through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2017
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Cat. no. 14

Barbara Brash
Skull of a triceratops 1971
 thermograph and colour screenprint
 image 40.9 x 57.3 cm; sheet 56.7 x 78.2 cm
 Colin Holden Charitable Trust
 © the estate of the artist



Cat. no. 15

Barbara Brash
Skull of a triceratops 1971
 colour screenprint; edition 1/8
 image 40.8 x 57.3 cm; sheet 56.5 x 77.9 cm
 Colin Holden Charitable Trust
 © the estate of the artist



Cat. no. 16

Barbara Brash
Butterflies I c. 1971
 colour screenprint; edition of 20
 image 53.4 x 41.1 cm; sheet 75.9 x 57.4 cm
 Geelong Gallery
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 Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2017
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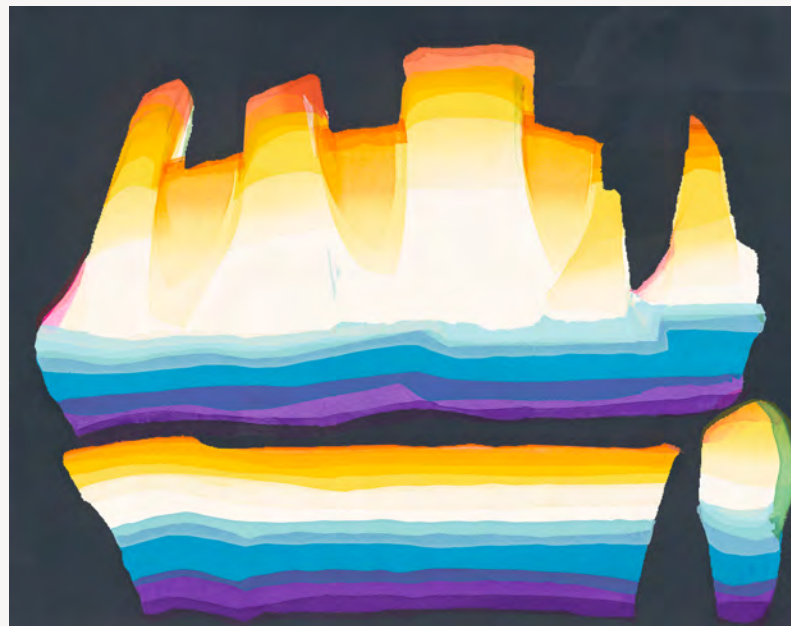
Cat. no. 17

Barbara Brash
Butterflies II c. 1971
 thermograph and colour screenprint; edition of 20
 image 58.7 x 41.2 cm; sheet 75.9 x 57.0 cm
 Geelong Gallery
 Gift of Moira Eckel through the Australian
 Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2017
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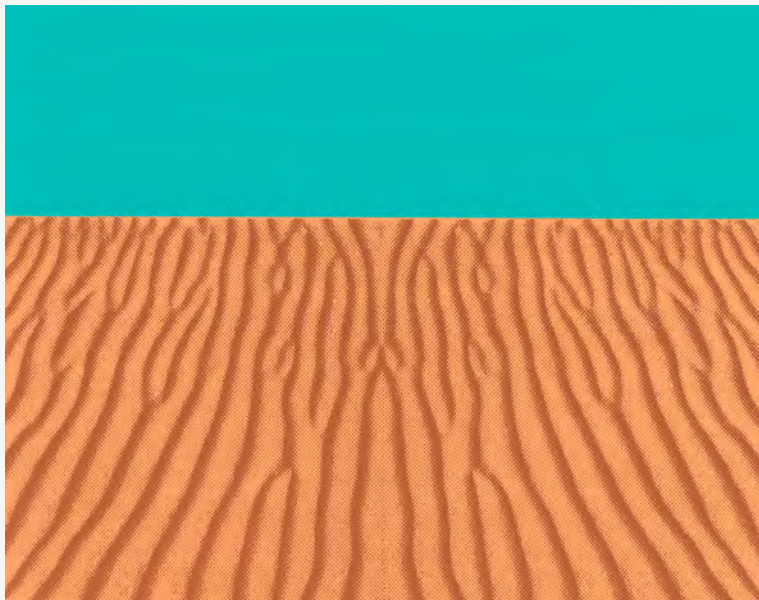
Cat. no. 18

Barbara Brash
Heat haze I 1974
 colour screenprint and mixed media;
 edition 8/10
 image 36.4 x 50.1 cm; sheet 57.0 x 75.8 cm
 Colin Holden Charitable Trust
 © the estate of the artist



Cat. no. 19

Barbara Brash
Ice 1978
 colour screenprint; edition of 12
 image 38.2 x 49.7 cm; sheet 56.8 x 76.1 cm
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Cat. no. 20

Barbara Brash
Desert II 1982
 colour screenprint; edition of 10
 image 35.6 x 45.7 cm; sheet 57.2 x 77.0 cm
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Cat. no. 21

Barbara Brash
Rain forest-rain 1982
 colour screenprint with PVA glue additions;
 edition of 20
 image 53.6 x 31.8 cm; sheet 76.2 x 56.9 cm
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Abstract painting
by [illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]



Abstract painting
by [illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]



Barbara Brash—Holding Form

A Geelong Gallery exhibition
25 June to 9 October 2022

Curator: Deirdre Cannon,
[Former] Curatorial Assistant, Geelong
Gallery

ISBN 978-0-6456800-0-3

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Inquiries should be directed to the
publisher.

Publisher: Geelong Gallery, 2022

Catalogue design: Geelong Gallery

Installation images: pp. 5, 17, 29

Photographer: Andrew Curtis

All other images: Geelong Gallery

Geelong Gallery warmly acknowledges
the Colin Holden Trust for the long-term
loan of the Colin Holden Collection, and
for their generous support of the Gallery
more widely.

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the Gallery and its collection is sited, the
Wadawurrung people of the Kulin Nation.
We pay our respects to their Elders,
past, present and emerging.

Exhibition partner

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Geelong Gallery is located on
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55 Little Malop Street, in Geelong's
arts precinct.

Travelling by train—
a 3 minute walk through Johnstone
Park from Geelong Railway Station.

Travelling by car—
60 minutes from Melbourne CBD.

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