JAMES GLEESON INTERVIEWS: ELWYN LYNN

24 July and 27 September 1979

JAMES GLEESON: Jack, can we begin at the beginning? When and where were you born?

ELWYN LYNN: I was born on 6 November, just the day before the Russian Revolution really broke out, in 1917, in a little town called Canowindra in New South Wales. When I was quite young my parents went to live at Junee Junction, and my mother still lives there. I went to school to third year to the Intermediate Certificate in Junee Junction and then I travelled daily to Wagga Wagga. I'm very proud of that. Always raises a laugh. I did the Leaving Certificate in Wagga Wagga. Having done that, I came to Sydney and did a BA degree and a Diploma of Education and I became a teacher and I taught a variety of things but mainly History and English. I was a career's adviser, advising people how to ruin the capitalist system, I think. I started teaching in 1941. Then in 1969, beginning of 1969, I came here to the University of Sydney as Curator of the Power Gallery of Contemporary Art within the Power Institute of Fine Arts.

JAMES GLEESON: Now, when did you become interested in art?

ELWYN LYNN: I became interested in art, well, when I was a boy I did things—
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JAMES GLEESON: Right from the earliest—

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, but they were very dependent upon other people. We had no proper art teaching.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

ELWYN LYNN: What used to happen was garbage cans were put up on the desk in front and that was art. Or we drew hats which we didn't like drawing. Boys used to hide their hats because the teacher would look around and say, 'We'll draw a hat today'. We drew hands and things of that nature and no notion of composition or anything at all. It was very, very bad.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no. Just object drawing?

ELWYN LYNN: Object drawing. Then I always a bit interested and when I came to the university I got interested in aesthetics. Professor Anderson, the Professor of Philosophy was interested in Freud and aesthetics, and naturally we got rather interested in surrealism. As a matter of fact, it was the notion of unconscious motives in art and something lying behind the old surface that attracted me. I really read a bit on aesthetics then. Then when I became a teacher I found that I just wanted to start fooling around and doing a little bit of painting. That's how I began.

JAMES GLEESON: What year would that be?

ELWYN LYNN: That would have been about 1942. I started to take it quite—

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

ELWYN LYNN: Forty-two, '43.

JAMES GLEESON: You didn't go to a formal art school at all?

ELWYN LYNN: No, no. I didn't go. I don't say that one shouldn't go. I think that I would have saved a lot of time in learning a lot of techniques if I had gone. But I didn't go to any of them at all. But I'm a bit like the old Irish lady, she hasn't been to university, but she's met the scholars.

JAMES GLEESON: Jack, your quite elaborate techniques that you developed, you developed them yourself?

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, partly by accident as well.

JAMES GLEESON: By experiment and—

ELWYN LYNN: And accident, yes. I learnt about PVA from a young chap called Vrga, V-R-G-A, in Milan. I talked to him about it, and I imported some from Italy. The Italians told me I was foolish, that I could get it in my own country, which I didn't believe. I brought it out and I mixed it with sand and things like that. When I put it out in the sun to dry, I noticed that the sand sank a little bit and it left a rather smoother surface. Then I found that by accident, just pushing against it, I could wrinkle it and do things to it and gouge it.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

ELWYN LYNN: That came rather accidentally. Many a parent has taken advantage of these accidents.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, indeed. Jack, your career then has been a sort of a dual one.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Always, because you've been painting and working.

ELWYN LYNN: Always, yes. A matter of fact, I think when I was younger–I probably still think it now–that to have full-time to paint would worry me a little. I'd like to do something else, you know, and be quite interested in something else.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I've seen enough boys, anyway, with full-time to paint and start using a lot of red wine in their painting, you know. But still I think it would be a good that people could have a break and just think hard about painting and nothing else for a time.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. When you first began painting in '42, were there influences from other artists in your work?

ELWYN LYNN: Well, the influences a little after '42, yes, were quite clear. I've got a cousin in the bush who's got a Drysdale by me, and she's also got a Sali Herman by me. Sali Herman was quite a strong influence for a while and Rudy Komon in his home at Watson's Bay, he has a scene from the Cross which is very Sali Herman-esque. I think he thinks it's a good one.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I remember that period.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: That's when I first encountered your work.

ELWYN LYNN: Then the only place to exhibit, of course, that one knew of in one's ignorance then was in the Wynne, Archibald and Sulman. So I put in the Sulman a couple of times and in the Wynne before one knew a great deal about art galleries, you know. I used to think that Macquarie Galleries was attached to the Royal History Society or something. I didn't know that you could go in there. But I think that would be quite the case with a lot of other people as well. So I started exhibiting there first.

JAMES GLEESON: Jack, when you really developed your own individual style, about what year was that? Late forties?

ELWYN LYNN: Oh well, yes. I'd started to get interested in a scumbly surface a little about 19—oh, no, quite late, 1956-7. Nineteen fifty-eight I went to the Venice Biennale, at the end of 1958, and just caught the Tàpies show.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: It was a sort of instant conversion on the road to Damascus, as it were.

JAMES GLEESON: A recognition.

ELWYN LYNN: A recognition. I thought: well, this is it.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Then of course we went north to Germany and this kind of informal art was all over Germany. There were people like Schumacher and Gerhard Hoehme and people of that nature, and I was entranced by it. But then, of course, I went Paris and one day just before we went down to Spain we went to the Museum of Modern Art in Paris and there was a show of abstract expressionism, much scorned by the Parisians. This was early '59.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I said, 'Well, I think we're off to see Gottlieb and Motherwell and de Kooning in New York. This is the great stuff'. And so it was. It was tremendous. But I think, you know, I think there's a connection between the Tàpies kind of thing, the informal thing, and the informalism of the Americans, which was much more painterly and much more delicious looking, you know. So that was the kind of thing that occurred then.

JAMES GLEESON: In between, you know, the early forties and the late fifties, what sort of work were you doing?

ELWYN LYNN: Well, yes. I was converted before this to a kind of abstract expressionism. I did an exhibition called The Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner in which I took various lines from the ancient mariner. I remember that awful woman who used to write for the Mirror.

JAMES GLEESON: Mary Corrigham

ELWYN LYNN: Mary Corrigham said, 'It's not much of the poem and not much of an exhibition'. I thought: oh well, if she thinks that of the poem, that will do me.

JAMES GLEESON: Where was that, Jack, what gallery?

ELWYN LYNN: That was at Macquarie Galleries. But they were really a bit more like still lifes than anything else. They weren't as cursive as abstract expressionism. Some of them weren't too bad. I think nearly all of them have practically disappeared. Nancy Borlase still owns one.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

ELWYN LYNN: I lifted the colour a bit. Also, from looking at *Art News,* I got interested in Hans Hofmann and the richness of colour. I had a colour thing for a while. Not for very long. As you know, Australian abstract expressionism wasn't very colourful.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no.

ELWYN LYNN: It was rather romantic and melancholy and so on and subdued.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: But in my innocence I didn't know that, you know, Hans Hofmann at that time wasn't even liked very much by museum people anywhere; that the colour was too high-pitched for many people.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: It's a different story today.

JAMES GLEESON: Of course, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: So I went off the colour and I think I've been off it ever since. It's very rarely that I use much colour at all.

JAMES GLEESON: When did you first go abroad, Jack?

ELWYN LYNN: Fifty-eight.

JAMES GLEESON: Fifty-eight.

ELWYN LYNN: Then I went through six months, '59, then came back teaching again. Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: In Sydney did you see that 1939 exhibition of French English art *The Melbourne Herald*—

ELWYN LYNN: No, I did not see that.

JAMES GLEESON: You didn't see it?

ELWYN LYNN: No.

JAMES GLEESON: You were in the country, were you?

ELWYN LYNN: No, that was '39.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Just before the—

ELWYN LYNN: No, I saw that.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I saw that, yes. Oh yes.

JAMES GLEESON: How did you react to that?

ELWYN LYNN: Oh, very strongly but a bit lost, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. You weren't yet in a position to take advantage of it?

ELWYN LYNN: No, I don't think so. Later on when I saw an Italian show and I saw Fontana with cuts, gouges and little pieces of red glass material stuck on it, I didn't like it at all.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

ELWYN LYNN: But now I think it's pretty entrancing, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: That one had all kinds of inhibitions about these things. Oh, I was bowled over by the more painterly works in that show. Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: You were still painting in a painterly way?

ELWYN LYNN: Oh yes, yes. Oh, I think there's nothing—

JAMES GLEESON: What about the French exhibition that came out? Oh, it had some good Manessier's and—

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, it had Manessier and it had various people like that and they had the chap who did that beautiful big painting called *Spring*.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, Marchand.

ELWYN LYNN: That influenced me for a while. I did a lot of little Marchand still-lives, very rich and crusty and in colour. You see that he used to break the surface a bit and let other colours show through in patches.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Somewhat in the manner that Eric Smith was doing, but no connection with Andre Marchand at all. That kind of broken thing, broken surface with other areas looking through, I think that also still remained in the texture painting later on in some way. But I thought the Marchand was rather terrific.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes. There would be a few Marchands around in peoples collections, I'm afraid, but still it heightened the colour.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: You know that one didn't have much guidance but I think the Hans Hofmann thing and, you know, I did a painting in a Hans Hofmann style called *Torrid day* and I had a bit of a crack at Tachism and I called it a Tachismo. Mr Paul Haefliger got very annoyed and accused me of jumping on the bandwagon and what will not come naturally to me comes by rape, he said. My father said, 'The bugger'.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, Jack, it appears strange that your early years as an artist, you were eclectic, you were looking all over the place.

ELWYN LYNN: Oh, absolutely.

JAMES GLEESON: And then suddenly when you found the right thing you went absolutely consistent ever since.

ELWYN LYNN: Pretty consistent, yes. I've been working a lot on paper.

JAMES GLEESON: A logical development within that, but you haven't changed?

ELWYN LYNN: No, I haven't.

JAMES GLEESON: You've found the way that's right for you.

ELWYN LYNN: I think so, yes, found the way and the light and all that. Maybe, you know, but maybe if one was forced to use a lot of colour it might do one some good. I don't know, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, I don't think—I know Paul used to have this theory.

ELWYN LYNN: There aren't many colourists.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

ELWYN LYNN: In the world, ever.

JAMES GLEESON: Paul Haefliger always used to say, 'Whatever you can do good, well, don't do. And whatever you can't do, force yourself to do it'.

ELWYN LYNN: Course you do, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: I think that was a rather specious kind of—

ELWYN LYNN: A bit specious yes. It's a Paul Haefliger—

JAMES GLEESON: Well, Jack, can we look at the ones that we hold of yours at the moment?

ELWYN LYNN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: There's a very early one, I think dating from '64. Now, have we got the right date on that? It was purchased in '64. It could have been painted a bit earlier.

ELWYN LYNN: Well, I'm not too certain about the date. I think I won a prize with that, at Orange or somewhere. I think Lloyd Rees gave me the prize.

JAMES GLEESON: It's called *Winterscape*, isn't it?

ELWYN LYNN: Yes. It's very, very crumbly. At the bottom part, the influence there is partly, I suppose–although it's more squared up–is partly Alberto Burri because of the burnt pieces of cloth and material that's there.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. But it is a mixed media?

ELWYN LYNN: It's a mixed media. The top part looks very much like cement, but it's not cement. I put a fair bit of gravel in it there.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I've got all kinds of funny little things moving around. As a matter of fact, when I look at it now, having not looked at it for many years, I see a bit of Miro there.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, in some of those forms and little figures. Actually, more in this probably than in the original. I think it's got a sense of an emergence of forms coming out of it. I think it was overseas. I think it was in India once with the Australian ambassador to India or high commissioner.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. It would have been bought by the Commonwealth Art Advisory Board.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, that's right, and it was moved around.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: It's got white paint on it too that's allowed to run.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: So that, you know, the abstract expressionism is something there that Tàpies or Burri would not have done, allowing a little bit of the Pollockian drip to get into the picture.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. So it really is a composite kind of—

ELWYN LYNN: It's a composite thing. and it's still looking around a bit.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: But of course that's what art history is about. Where did he get that from?

JAMES GLEESON: Jack, before we leave it, did you use PVA for this or is it oil?

ELWYN LYNN: It was PVA on that.

JAMES GLEESON: PVA. And oil?

ELWYN LYNN: There's oil paint, yes, and house paint and various kinds and acrylic paints. House paints would be acrylic. Yes, you can see that it's been slashed in places and holed in places and crumbled and pushed with your fingers and so on.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. And burnt you mentioned?

ELWYN LYNN: There are burnt holes in the bottom canvas section, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: There are burnt parts. It's supposed to look a bit like debris and a bit ravaged and worn and, oh, the results of something else as it were.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Time and seeing it and working on it.

ELWYN LYNN: The other thing, of course, when I left Spain and went up into Germany of course one goes to a city like Hamburg and sees it still half destroyed.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: This was in '59.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

ELWYN LYNN: There were still signs of great areas of destruction and Munich, you know, various areas of that. There was a lot of kind of feeling that, well, this is the archaeology of war as it were.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I took a great interest in archaeology. Some people thought I was taking an interest in moonscapes round about this time, but I wasn't at all, not really. It was this kind of man's imprint on things, as it were. Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. In retrospect, do you feel that this whole sort of movement, the sort of Tàpies, Burri kind of thing, was a reaction to visual experiences left by the war?

ELWYN LYNN: I think so, yes. I think so. Of course, you know, it stems out of–in the case of Burri and so on–it's a peculiar thing that in Spain and Italy, especially in Spain, they don't care about mixing the modes very much.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

ELWYN LYNN: At church you'll find the Baroque and the Gothic mixed together.

JAMES GLEESON: Of course.

ELWYN LYNN: You'll find a great deal of this. Marinetti, though he painted, well he urged people to paint in futurist manner, talked about anything can come into a work of art, you know. Beads and string or anything at all. I think this, strange enough, has been a kind of Mediterranean thing, a Spanish/Italian thing. Then you'll get it in Germany but, you know, they don't mix things up so much in Germany. They're purer in formless, as it were. I think it was a reaction to the war and I think it was a reaction to things that are well made. I think Tàpies talks a lot about freedom and the human spirit and things of that nature. He's got a certain scorn for the comforts of the world–refrigerators and things, I suppose, although he'd have one–but a scorn for those things and a love of the thing that's discarded. Of course, you know, this is the Dubuffet thing as well. So there's a link between all this Burri, Dubuffet and the Germans and Tàpies and the Spaniards.

JAMES GLEESON: I'm very interested in your, you know, notion that it could have stemmed from the war.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: When you think of Picasso's *Guernica* and his reaction to it, it's in a way related. It's an instinctive reaction against the violence of war. But with Tàpies, Burri and you, and other people who used this mode, it's more an eyewitness account of the kind of results that have—

ELWYN LYNN: Yes. Oh, it's a kind of reconciliation with these things, you know, as it were.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: It's an acceptance in some way.

JAMES GLEESON: And often finding a sort of beauty in it.

ELWYN LYNN: Finding a beauty in it, yes. But I remember that Frank Cozzarelli who used to be here once wrote an article in *Art in Australia* and he said I was

plug ugly, which is an Americanism meaning just plain ugly. But I guess there are ugly areas, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, well, if—

ELWYN LYNN: But then I'm consoled by Paul Haefliger saying that there's always a bit of a dauber, daub in the best of art, you know. He says. Anyway, it's a bit hard to define all this but I know that I used to look at archaeological things. I was very interested the Terme Museum in Rome and places like the Etruscan one in Rome and we looked hard at that. Old headstones and things get you in a little bit at this stage. But partly I think that you're after some kind of feeling that the worn thing has got some kind of symbolic meaning.

JAMES GLEESON: Because it indicates a passage of time?

ELWYN LYNN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: The way the elements—

ELWYN LYNN: Yes. Of course, what had happened to me, I'd read Susan Langor's book on *Feeling and form* in which she argues that all arts and the dance, everything, is symbolic of certain emotions not otherwise expressible. They're akin to melancholy, akin to joy, or akin to pervasive happiness or akin to vicious retaliation or something like that. They're akin to things. I was a bit on about that, as a matter of fact. That was buoyed up by, you know, the things that Rothko and de Kooning and others were saying, that they were creating a new kind of myth. They weren't decorators by any means. So I think there was a lot of that spirit around.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I think it was around then. I think it was around in the Australian painters. No question, you know, Len Hessing and Johnny Olsen.

JAMES GLEESON: The gate had begun to close a bit by that time.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: I think in the late sixties already in Australia people were aware of what was going on overseas.

ELWYN LYNN: Oh, sure.

JAMES GLEESON: In a way that a generation earlier didn't happen.

ELWYN LYNN: Had no idea at all.

JAMES GLEESON: It took 30 years.

ELWYN LYNN: It took 30 years. They're more acutely aware of what was happening.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, quite so. You know, at one stage when I used to get *Art News* I was one of the very few people who got it at all. You couldn't just after the war, for a quite a while after the war, you couldn't get the money.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no.

ELWYN LYNN: You couldn't get a grant to buy magazines and subscriptions like that. Then gradually more and more people got it and so many got it then that everybody started turning against what they call the glossy magazine. All magazines are glossy. I don't want any magazines that are not glossy. So they turned against it, yes. I think that what we've got now was a diversion, but what we have now when you go round the Sydney galleries, we've got a lot of nice surfaces and flat and, oh, you know, we've got some real young decorators at work at present, you know. A lot of empty art on, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: That will be inevitable and I suppose it always has been.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: But more so now because there are simply more artists about than ever before.

ELWYN LYNN: I think that's so, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: But, if I can interrupt, one of the things that has changed–and you've been very largely responsible for it–is the fact that up till, you know, the Power began to form it's collection, the only way artists had of actually coming in real contact with the works, except through the magazines, was to go abroad.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Now you've brought it very soon after it's been created.

ELWYN LYNN: Well, you brought some of it. Pity we can't show more of it.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: That is true, that they had to go abroad. Then, unless they were very, very convinced, they'd bring back what they thought was alien material and they didn't get much local reinforcement to pursue it. But some people were pretty tough about it, you know, I think, and people like Olsen who brought back some of the Coburg group attitudes. I think he stuck it out and with good results. I think that was important. But, of course, some people would go abroad and they'd just go abroad in order to relish things and sort of confirm themselves in a style they've adopted which is so pleasant to them, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I think there's no harm in that. Like David Strachan, for example.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: It would be absurd to say, 'Well, he went abroad and he never changed'. Well, why should he, you know?

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. No, I think if you find your right voice as an artist you don't need to change.

ELWYN LYNN: Sure.

JAMES GLEESON: But anything that comes can enrich in a different sort of way.

ELWYN LYNN: That is so, yes. Of course, with an older artist it's looked upon as curious that he should make a change. Whereas younger artist are expected these days to jump around.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: In the 1940's young artists were not supposed to jump around. They were supposed to get to cleave to the furrow or whatever it is, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Stick to your last.

JAMES GLEESON: Otherwise you're in danger of not having real convictions.

ELWYN LYNN: Real convictions, yes. But now it's quite different, which is a good thing I think in some ways. In some ways, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Jack, before we go on with these, looking back over the way artists changed, you know, in the past 10 or 15 years, do you see any difference, regional difference, say, in Australia? Difference between the way Melbourne has reacted to the way Sydney has reacted to it. Has the Power had more influence, detectable influence, among Sydney artists for instance because there's nothing quite comparable to it in Melbourne?

ELWYN LYNN: Well, I think the Power may have had some influence. It's very hard to tell about this. You know those articles that appear in *Art in Australia*, or have appeared, asking artists how they were affected by certain things, and nothing much comes out of it.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

ELWYN LYNN: I think it's almost subliminal, you know. I think it would have an influence. I think it would have an influence on Sydney art especially. I think Sydney art, it's a lesser get-together kind of community of artists here.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes. I felt that too.

ELWYN LYNN: I think that what happens is in Sydney artists who want to be a little different are confirmed in wanting to be a bit different, without being influenced by any particular work in the Power Collection. They might say, 'Well, I'm right. I'm as different as these people are from one another in the Power Collection', which is a very Catholic kind of collection. I think that's one thing, they're confirmed in that, you see. We got a little show of selected pieces down

at the Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education at present, in the Ivan Dougherty Gallery. I've be talking to people there. Well, different students find different things of great interest. The little Duchamp etchings, well, the conceptualists like those, and others like the more sumptuous and sensuous pieces and so on. So I think rather than having—we haven't got the works up permanently.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

ELWYN LYNN: Now, the Red Studio in the Museum of Modern Art by Matisse has influenced generations of painters in New York. We haven't got that. But I think what we've done, what's happened is that attitudes have shifted. I think that's the same with the Sydney Biennale, you know. Attitudes shift, you know. Suddenly somebody in Australia thinks he's a terrific non-conformist, and he is a non-conformist. Finds out, well, non-conformism is a movement. Everybody's a non-conformist. What's the good of being a revolutionary when everybody's a revolutionary? There's nothing to rebel against. But I think that that kind of attitude has been encouraged by it, and I think it's more of a—I think we've had some great works of art that were on show for a while, you know. But there aren't many Matisse Red studios. As a matter of fact there's only one.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: But I think that it's the variety and the sort of sense of varied achievements that you can get that's been important about the Power, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, this has always struck me, that each showing that I've seen when you've put up the years acquisitions, the range of styles has been a sort of slicing through of all that's been going on throughout the whole world of that time.

ELWYN LYNN: Sure.

JAMES GLEESON: Now that simply must have an effect in suggesting to local artists, Sydney artists, that the range of possibilities are infinite.

ELWYN LYNN: You know, you might say, 'Well, all great art movements have been movements that carried along the best of the generation of artists', and that to have an open ended thing might not be particularly good, you know. I mean, you might say, 'Well, some of the greatest art in Australia was produced by the Antipodeans and then by the abstract expressionists'.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: To have it open ended may not be the right way. That maybe these people haven't enough initiative of their own and resilience to be great individuals, but I just don't know about that. I think, well, you can't do anything about it anyway.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

ELWYN LYNN: No. But, still, I wouldn't advocate one thing over the other.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no.

ELWYN LYNN: But I think there are certain periods in which people are swept along by one particular style, sort of like bush impressionism or something like that, and then they're swept along by something else. It's conducive to some very good work and it's also conducive to some imitative epigone–epigones, that's a good word–who are not worth much. Yes, sure.

JAMES GLEESON: But do you, as I feel, that there is developing quite a regional difference between Sydney—

ELWYN LYNN: I think so and I think it's also developing—you see, it's a funny thing. We've been talking about the fact that not many critics get around much anymore and we don't go to Melbourne and Sydney and Adelaide. There's very little movement because the fares are so high, et cetera. But maybe there's also a lack of a desire to get around very much. That Melbourne people think that they won't learn a great deal from Sydney and vice versa.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I mean, you get a Senbergs and you get the chap, Baldessin, in Melbourne who are very Melbournian kind of dead serious—

JAMES GLEESON: Very close knit society.

ELWYN LYNN: Close knit society, a bit heavily thematic in their work, and this kind of thing. It has been said before about Sydney. Sydney's got a more vitalistic kind of spirit, more open and free and so on.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I think that if, say, Brett Whiteley lived in Melbourne he'd be given little lectures on being a little more serious and not painting so many throw away paintings and things.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Whereas he can thrive in Sydney, which likes this kind of open, vitalistic kind of thing. You know, all comes from old Lindsay and all that.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. It is a different atmosphere.

ELWYN LYNN: I think it is a different atmosphere.

JAMES GLEESON: You can't speak of school to art, but there is that difference, I think.

ELWYN LYNN: I think so, and I think that Melbourne painters, Melbourne painters always seem to regard painting as something that you are dedicated to at a very high serious fashion. You know. I mean, Sidney Nolan can sit down and do 20 drawings of flowers if he wanted to, but he doesn't want to. When he gets the conviction he'll do them. The ones he does under conviction mightn't be much better than the other ones, if he did do them. But this is the way they work and they sort of get up steam, as it were, then off they go. I think that's an attitude they have, it's a Melbourne thing. I think Charlie Blackman still has it to

some degree. Although Sidney Nolan says that Charlie has domesticated his talents. It might be a little true. I think that that's what happens, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I think that if Mike Johnson still lived in Melbourne his present show might be just a little deeper, a little bit tougher, a few more risks. I think the Melbourne painters may take a few more risks. Sydney produced the charm school, which is not to be denigrated as much as we used to denigrate it. It think it produced it and it produced it because they see that, you know, the word decorative is not a dirty word in art, at all.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no.

ELWYN LYNN: And some beautiful things can be done. Whereas I think Melbourne's a bit wary of the decorative artist.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: But the fact that Fred Cress came up to live in Sydney, and the fact that Alun Leach-Jones did as well, I think that could easily be because their work was starting to have kinship here.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Although the latest Alun Leach-Jones' were those yellow criss-cross latticework things. I think they would seem to me to come out of Picabia a little bit. I think they're not quite so decorative as the others were, but I think this might be their spiritual home temporarily anyway. Yes, I think there's a bit of that there, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, Jack, let's go back now to the examples. This I think is the next one chronologically. It's called *Walther Konig.*

ELWYN LYNN: Well, *Walther Konig*, yes. He's got a bookshop in Burgstrasse, No 93–it's got it written on here–in Cologne. He's got beautiful books and beautiful catalogues and so on.

JAMES GLEESON: You have a sort of professional relationship with him?

ELWYN LYNN: That's right, yes. I've owed him money. He was going to sue me at one stage on the international suing system, oh yes. They wrote to me, the lawyers, from Cologne. I told them I'd call on them when I went there, but I didn't go there. Yes. I don't know that the title is—well, Konig means king, of course.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, of course.

ELWYN LYNN: But I don't mean to think that means very much at all in it. It seemed to fit there quite nicely at the time. I was doing a lot of packages with little seals on them and things like that. I used a lot of sealing wax at one stage. I put pennies on them, then I found other objects. I even got some African weights that they use on scales.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh yes (inaudible) gold weights

ELWYN LYNN: I used the gold weights on some. Not on this one. Obviously I was influenced, when you compare this one with *Winterscape*.

JAMES GLEESON: *Winterscape*.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, it's less informal. It's much more formal and obviously he's come under the influence of minimalism and hard-edge painting and so on.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: But, nonetheless, I was on about tensions and tugging and things of that nature. I think that the (inaudible) Walther Konig, sort of is something that comes back a little bit from the past, but it also looks a bit, you know, more like the work I've done in the last couple of years, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

ELWYN LYNN: The bits of torn paper are coming into it, you know. I had no torn paper in these early ones at all.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no.

ELWYN LYNN: Because they wouldn't have sort of carried the weight, as it were. They'd have looked a bit too fragile, you know—real heavy stuff, this early stuff. I think that's it, yes. I think it's about packages, about tidying things up, but things can't be tidied up. I think it's about trying to bring a rigour into a material world that resists it.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I think it's something about that, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Have we got the date right ,Jack?

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, the date's right, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: And the medium, it's a mixed medium? What did you use? Paper?

ELWYN LYNN: I've used cord and a piece of paper, wrapping paper from Cologne, and I've used PVA and dry pigment, and that's all.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: And it's on canvas. Yes, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Good. Do you normally work on canvas?

ELWYN LYNN: I work on canvas mainly, yes. I used to be able to buy the raw canvas. I can't get it now, but I work mainly on canvas. Oh well, it feels better. I like it better. Masonite, I think I can spot a painting on masonite in no time. There's a certain almost undetectable surface of something on canvas, however thick you may put it on. You say to yourself, 'That's on canvas, and that's on board'. It starts to look funny and stiff. I think it's the brush stroke as well. If you're

using a palette knife and you press the palette on to canvas, you know that when you lift it off, it's got a smoother edge. If you could do it on masonite, it's got a squarer edge like a cliff.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, and things like that.

JAMES GLEESON: Jack, how do you work?

ELWYN LYNN: I work flat, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, and straight on—

ELWYN LYNN: I do sketches first.

JAMES GLEESON: You do?

ELWYN LYNN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: That's what I was going to ask.

ELWYN LYNN: But then I look at the sketches. They're on bits of paper and sometimes they're on fairly big pieces of paper. Then I spread them out and then I get the canvas and I stare at it for a while and I say, 'Right, now let's go. Let's see what happens'. Once you've done these things, you can't do much about it. So that you can only scrape them off or burn them in the incinerator later on. So I work flat. You put the glue on first, then you've made your mixture. It's like making Christmas puddings all your life. Then you spread it with a—oh, these egg lifters, I saw them in America first. They're like a ruler with a handle on the end, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: They bend. They're long, thin things.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, yes, flexible.

ELWYN LYNN: Very flexible.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I use those and push it around and then usually put it out in the sun, of which we've got a lot of in this country, thank heavens. You put it out in the sun which dries the top surface, and then you can start wrinkling and pushing and shoving. For instance, those cords wouldn't sink into it too well when you first did it. You push them down into it.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Then you push it with your finger as it's drying. Then you get holes.

JAMES GLEESON: It's almost like modelling.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, my daughter has come out and said, 'Can I make a few holes?' and she's made a few holes and so on. Only acceptable holes though. But I've never seen her make a hole that shouldn't be there. You do that and you push it around, and that's about it. Yes. But I suppose it's like a hard edge painter, you know, he's got to calculate the size of the area and how much the area can impinge upon the other area. But this one, the ochre areas on the four ochre rectangles would have been done first. Then I'd have thought about the colour on the side here, which is sort of black with another green on the bottom. I'd have thought about that a fair while, you know, what goes with it and so on.

JAMES GLEESON: How close is the final painting to your original drawing? Do they deviate a lot from the images?

ELWYN LYNN: Not very much from the original scheme. The colour might, the look might. For example, in this one I've gone in for what is called elegant variation. I've got two cords at the top, then I've got one that's a cut, and then I've got one that's a dotted line. A little bit of elegant or inelegant variation there. That, of course, those criss-crosses are taken up with the one I've got down at the bottom. This is flat black, if I remember rightly, and this is a little heaped there.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

ELWYN LYNN: And little holes are made in it. Yes, that has to be fairly close to—

JAMES GLEESON: Your original sketch is more a sort of geometric outlay of the scheme.

ELWYN LYNN: Oh, my word, yes. That is so, yes. So that it's quite different from, say, abstract expressionism where they have the encounter with the canvas straight off.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: You just can't draw it up beforehand. Whereas some of them like *Winterscape*, this would probably be closer to the kind of extemporaneous thing that we did in abstract expressionism.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: The cuts and the jabs and the drawing and letting the paint run. Yes. A little more wilful than this, you see, a little more controlled. I found they were getting more and more controlled actually, yes, as I was doing that.

JAMES GLEESON: Jack, which is the right way up?

ELWYN LYNN: That's the right way up as it is there now.

JAMES GLEESON: It's a horizontal painting?

ELWYN LYNN: It is a horizontal painting. It's been reproduced twice now.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: It was hung in Melbourne. Oh, it's been reproduced in *Art in Australia* the wrong way, yes. It was hung rather. The exhibition in Melbourne at those people Travelodge, it was hung this way so they could read it, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. Well, I suppose the automatic thing would be to put the writing up the right way.

ELWYN LYNN: Of course it is, yes. Immediately then it commits one of the offences against Greenberg's rule, see, it becomes very, very—you put it this way it becomes very balanced.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: What Greenberg says, 'The real trouble with most abstract painting is it's too symmetrical. It's too balanced. We want to kick it off kilter'. So I kick it off kilter, so what do they do? They put it in kilter again. You can't win.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, I've got two from 1973, *Desert profile* and *Dark stele*.

ELWYN LYNN: Now I wonder is that *Dark stele*? I wonder is that S-T-E-L-E?

JAMES GLEESON: S-T-E-L-E, is it? Oh, good.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, I think it is. I think it might be.

JAMES GLEESON: Good. Well, that's what we need.

ELWYN LYNN: Now which way does that go, I wonder? I think if it's a *Stele* it will probably go up that way. Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: It will go up that way.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. I'm sure that's—

ELWYN LYNN: You should be able to tell from the back because it will be signed on the back. Mrs Carnegie influenced me in that regard. Yes, that's got some wood that's cut at the bottom and it's holed wood, and it's 1973. So it's a kind of a return, as it were, to the Burri kind of influence. I just don't know about that date there.

JAMES GLEESON: Seventy-one?

ELWYN LYNN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: For the Walther Konig.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: We purchased it in 1976 from Joe Brown in Melbourne.

ELWYN LYNN: I doubt it. I think it's later.

JAMES GLEESON: Is it?

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, I think it's later.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, we'll put a query for that.

ELWYN LYNN: I'll look it up in my books, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: All right, good.

ELWYN LYNN: We'll put a little question mark there because this one, this one I think would be before that and '73 would be right for this one.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, that's very like the one we have at home of yours, which is wood—

ELWYN LYNN: Is it '73? Before that.

JAMES GLEESON: Before that.

ELWYN LYNN: Before that.

JAMES GLEESON: A good deal before.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, that would be before '73. That would be, *Dark Stele*.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: This *Desert profile*, everything's '73 here. I think that's later than '73.

JAMES GLEESON: We've got '73, mixed medium, bought '73 from Bonython?

ELWYN LYNN: Oh well, it must be '73. Yes, it must be '73. I think this is—

JAMES GLEESON: You think *Walther Konig* is later than '71?

ELWYN LYNN: Oh, it mightn't be much later. I might have had a reversion. But I'll just have to look it up, won't I?

JAMES GLEESON: All right. But *Dark stele* certainly is like the one that we've had for many years at home.

ELWYN LYNN: That's right, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: It's certainly earlier than '73.

ELWYN LYNN: Oh yes, and I think I've got pieces of gold in there on the top there. I don't remember this painting very well at all.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

ELWYN LYNN: I don't know where you got it from. Where did you get it from?

JAMES GLEESON: Is that the Joe Brown one?

ELWYN LYNN: No. Okay, is it Powell Street.

JAMES GLEESON: Powell Street ’73.

ELWYN LYNN: I wonder what they’re doing with it.

JAMES GLEESON: Or it might have been a resale perhaps.

ELWYN LYNN: A resale probably, yes. Oh well, this stele, this idea of—

JAMES GLEESON: Grave stele.

ELWYN LYNN: Grave stele and a signpost and a marking and a grave post and head stones and all that, you know, marking in the termination of something. But of course, you know, all these headstones and gravestones are all very erect things and they’re all the penis that’s still in full flight, as it were. I suppose that plays a part, you know. But it’s about endurance, I think, and holding up of circumstances. I think it’s like that and I think it’s also it’s got—yes, that’s another thing I used to look at. I used to look when I was abroad at the Egyptian mummies lying in their–what are they called?–cases.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Sarcophagi.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes. They didn’t have any gold leaf on them but that also I think comes into it, you know, burnt wood and remnants, but things of that nature. A little bit macabre at times.

JAMES GLEESON: It gave this feeling of debris used again for another purpose.

ELWYN LYNN: That’s right, and trying to redeem it and resurrect it in some kind of way. I think that played an important part there.

JAMES GLEESON: Is there perhaps a paradox in this one which you’re referring to a stele which is pointing upward and also implying death? You’re using debris, broken material, charred wood and so on from a past, but giving it a new life, you know, in the composition so that there’s a fusion of paradoxes.

ELWYN LYNN: I think so. I think, you know, this is Eros and Thanatos at work a bit, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: In a fairly rough way, I’d say. Yes, I think this might be so, you know. Yes, I was a bit intrigued with Freudian notions of Eros and Thanatos. I read a lot of Freud at one stage.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: So I think this may have played a part, you know. But, of course, I don’t always know exactly what I’m up to.

JAMES GLEESON: No. Well, of course, if you allow for that subliminal subconscious thing to take an active part.

ELWYN LYNN: I think I've repressed the memory of this painting.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, it's obviously a dark, sombre work.

ELWYN LYNN: It's a dark sombre—

JAMES GLEESON: With a flash of gold somewhere.

ELWYN LYNN: That's right, yes. Vulgar gold, Bob Hughes called it. He knows the difference. Oh yes, that boy.

JAMES GLEESON: Now, what was it (inaudible) used to call gold? That glorious stupid metal that never changed.

ELWYN LYNN: Did he? Yes. This is *Desert profile* '73. Now I'm using epoxy resin. This surface, which is a difficult surface, I've got sand underneath there and a letter and all this kind of thing. Then I've drawn and made marks underneath in pastels, in various pastel pencils and so on, and in greasy pencils. Then I've covered it all–this is bare canvas around there and I've covered it all–with an epoxy resin.

JAMES GLEESON: The whole canvas or just this rectangular—

ELWYN LYNN: This piece here.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: The darkened piece, yes. It's a very drippy material. The person that I looked at who was doing that—and it's a very strange thing that it should be a person like Edward Kienholz, who's a great commentator on these matters and drips things everywhere.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: But it's also a survival of making the surface still look alive, as it were. I'm starting to feel it's a bit artificial now but that doesn't matter, he said, having done something like it just recently. But it's to keep the thing alive and breathing, you know, and it's to see the world through this kind of mirror-like surface. But then I got a bit interested in what conceptualists were doing and why they were drawing all the time, and why they were making notes of things as though these notes and signs of where they'd been, you know, were far more important, the process far more important than the finished object.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: So I incorporated these profile kind of drawings down the bottom. One's nearly a straight drawing and the others are profiles and they're on canvases, some are on canvas or paper that's stained.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I just wanted to get some sort of an idea of a feeling of the desert. I did another painting later on called *From the deserts the prophets come*.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh yes, yes. Serle wrote a book with the same title.

ELWYN LYNN: That's right, yes, yes. That's right. It's a line, it's a line of Australian poetry from somewhere or other. Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Are these little profiles collaged on to it?

ELWYN LYNN: They're collaged on. They're on pieces of canvas, yes, same canvas as the background canvas.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: You can see that what happened there was that from *Walther Konig* with a squared up thing, I'd come back to something a bit looser but a little more intellectual, I think. I think I got a bit more interested in putting some ideas back into art. That instead of these sort of universal ideas, I was after a full stop.

JAMES GLEESON: Jack, continuing about *Desert profile*, you were just going to say, before we came to a full stop.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes. I think that I wanted to put into the art a few ideas, you know. I think the earlier art was considered with universal ideas, Eros and Thanatos and so on.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: And decay and change in all around I see kind of notions. Then I thought, well, I wanted to think about how people look at things a bit. I think these things are a little bit—I've been influenced by those artists who are concerned with how one comes to perceive things.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: How you look at a detail of a painting next to a painting. You say to yourself, 'Well, this is a detail blown up and this is the actual painting' and you start relating the two as it were. I think the idea of the process of drawing these profiles and then there's no really profile in the big thing at all. It's sort of just a swarm of sand floating around and so on.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Then in the middle of it there's an express letter sent to somebody. I forget now who that's sent to. I think it might be Sidney Nolan Esquire. I think it is.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Little jokes like that. That's the other thing that's started to enter in, little mementos, as it were, really Victorian stuff.

JAMES GLEESON: Personal things?

ELWYN LYNN: Personal things.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: You know, on the one hand people will tell you that all art is autobiographical, but if you get too autobiographical they say you're becoming too obscure. Well, one doesn't—I once played a joke at one of these things. I took one of the stamps off from, say, England, and put a stamp on from Germany. Say I had four stamps. Well, one of stamps would go. But the clever young Daniel Thomas, he spotted the wrong stamp there. Yes, he mentioned it in a criticism, you know. Yes. Where before they were pretty much self-contained, the pictures were like icons, you know, like the *Stele* and pretty self-contained and no big pardons and sort of not compromised in a way. In other words, the illusions and references were contained.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: In this one the illusions and references started to float off a little bit. This is what I think, you know, I've been influenced by some conceptual artists and process artists and that you don't confine people to the illusions. The notion that art of course is not to be literary, and all this kind of thing–the Greenbergian thing. Well, it doesn't rate with me at all. I don't mind if it's not literary and, if it is literary, I hope to be able to paint paintings as you do in surrealism for example, to be able to paint paintings that have a whole number of associations and illusions and yet not too many.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: This is a very difficult thing, you know, that it stays within certain confines. That is the difficult thing. I think this is when the picture's got a good message coming out. The message may be multiple messages, but nonetheless they're not infinite. There's a stop somewhere, that they're contained within a certain area.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, it seems to me clear that this is to do with a desert.

ELWYN LYNN: Oh, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Kind of flatness of the things, these might be spinifexes.

ELWYN LYNN: Oh, they may be spinifexes. They're marks.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, the desert.

JAMES GLEESON: If that is Sid Nolan, well, I think there is a sort of nice relationship—

ELWYN LYNN: Of course, of course. And you know that one can't help being influenced by Sidney Nolan having done books now.

JAMES GLEESON: Of course.

ELWYN LYNN: I can say that right now. This *Dundoo Hills*, this drawing here, when I did the book on Sid, on Australian landscape painting, I asked Sidney Nolan to do a drawing for the end papers.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: So I sketched a drawing that he'd done and sent it to him and he sent it back sketched a little larger.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Right. And he called it *Junee*. Now, he's never been to Junee where I was as a boy. He's never been there, but he called it Junee. Then, having done the original from him, and he's only copied the original of mine, this is an ironic kind of joke thing. Now, Nancy Borlase in a criticism said the influence of Sidney Nolan is there. But I regard that as no more an influence than did Rauschenberg when he put abstract expressionist brush strokes in his paintings.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: For him, abstract expressionism was just part of the debris of the world.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: For me the Sidney Nolan drawing is just part of the material that is around.

JAMES GLEESON: Is available. Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: And I just simply use that. But unconsciously I've probably been influenced by Sidney Nolan in more ways than I realise.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Seeing that I've got a few on the wall, minor ones, and the spinifex, the overall look, you know as we all know those 1950, '51, '52 desert things he did were magnificent paintings. Unconsciously one may be just sort of influenced by that, you see.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: But, of course, he's such a straight on man. He's got to get the one emotion, as he says, in the picture right across. I'm a bit more inclined to have little additives and disgraceful notes here and there, I think. But I think you might say that and, you know, I see a lot of him. You know, I write to him a great deal. There's the latest collection of printed matter that goes off to him. It gets compiled and compiled until it's not too expensive. He gets it over there. He gets all kinds of stuff, politics and art and the lot, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: You're keeping him up to date on Australia.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes. Oh, he relishes those things, oh yes, and reads them with irony and so on. So I think that you might say that. It is peculiar that I should do

anything on the desert, you know, when you look at it. I mean, people have said, 'Well look, you look at Tàpies and you look at all these things', and suddenly you come back and you do the desert, shiny on the surface like a mirage floating away there. You do that and yet, you know, under the great Tàpies influences, you wouldn't have dreamt of doing the desert.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

ELWYN LYNN: You'd have scorned it, you'd have considered it not a fit topic. But you change, you know. You find yourself sketching things when you're flying in an aeroplane and so on. I think those things may have combined, because there's no doubt that Drysdale, Nolan, and probably Hans Heysen at moments, are great desert painters and what they did stays lingering in the mind.

JAMES GLEESON: Jack, I find looking at these two side by side, that is *Dark stele* and *Desert profile*, an immense difference in–what can you call it?–emotional tone.

ELWYN LYNN: Oh, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: One is forceful, almost brutal in its—.

ELWYN LYNN: That's right.

JAMES GLEESON: And one is almost elegant, you know, it has a refinement, a subtlety.

ELWYN LYNN: That's right.

JAMES GLEESON: They're a different kind of tone in the work.

ELWYN LYNN: There is, and there's a great deal more elegance and, well, I think there are many more grace notes.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I think things are put there with—I find myself, you know, in doing the collages, looking around for something that might just set something off as it were. The idea of taking, as for instance Melares did, and twisting a piece of canvas and staining it with all sorts of things and plonking it down in the middle, I don't think I could do that now. I bought a book on Melares when I was in Barcelona last year, about last November, and it fascinated me but I put it on a shelf. There's a couple of things in there I think are pretty good, but I suddenly felt, 'No, I can't quite do that'. I think they're terrific things but I can't quite do it anymore. I think there's an elegance and a subtlety and a sheer decorativeness and a certain humour has come there, you see. That even in these days, when I was doing the gloomy steles and so on, I can make a joke occasionally but not in the picture.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no.

ELWYN LYNN: But this started to come into the picture. I think this is also associated with the notion that, you see, early collage–well, collage in Picasso and Braque–was always considered a very formal thing.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: If you read Greenburg's essay it's very formal. But now we know it wasn't so formal, that they had little jokes in them. When Picasso sometimes picked things, he picked things for certain historical reasons and we can read the story of the Balkan wars.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: He didn't pick something foolish or anything like that.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

ELWYN LYNN: So I think that they were very formal things, but they were also references outside them.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes. Like the Merzbau.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes. Like the Merzbau, yes, all the time there's references, you know. I'd start to think, well, the debris thing is not the only thing, the burnt out thing. Burnt out cases, as it were, is not the only thing. The other thing is that, well, these are things of life that's just been spent, but they're also as with–oh, the Merzbau man, Schwitters–as with Schwitters, it's an on-going thing, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: It's a recording, it's a building and it's a recording of life, well, what he put in his house.

JAMES GLEESON: Like a coral reef. Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, I think that it's—I'll put that down here, coral reef. My wife will see that and say, 'Who's this Coral'. But I think this is it. I think that it's a building of life proliferating.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Rather than looking too much at the discard of the debris. I think that one can fall too much for the prevailing ideology that this is all about redemption of the debris and the resurrection of the things that are usually discarded.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: And falling for the Dubuffet thing that, you know, a footprint in the sand is more important that a beautifully drawn foot in a renaissance painting. So I think that one might look at it the other way round, as you just mentioned, that it's a growing kind of thing, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. It's much more basically optimistic than that.

ELWYN LYNN: Oh, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: A degree of pessimism. Thanatos.

ELWYN LYNN: There's no doubt that Thanatos and the pessimism is there, and now that one is reaching towards the pearly gates one had better get a bit optimistic. I think it is more optimistic and they're much more cheerful and they're fresher looking. As Ken Unsworth said to my wife about the last show I had, he said, 'Don't tell your husband but he paints like a young person. He might feel insulted'. Well, oh yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Well now, that's obviously in mood akin to (inaudible) in the sense that this is a joyous—

ELWYN LYNN: It's a joyous thing, you see. It's a funny thing when you get it in black and white like this and you're not looking at the colour and; a little bit of watercolour I've got there and so on. But you've got this float away envelope here, floating in the thing, and you've got these forms are floating, and these are moving around of course. Of course, Daniel once said, much to my annoyance but he may have been true, that a lot of sexual symbolism was latent in the earlier paintings. And there's no question about the sexual symbolism of this, you know, this darting across, as it were, and spilling and so on.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Even though these icon-like ones like *Stele* they're very self-contained, nonetheless there's a separation of elements, you see. In the icon one there's about four separate elements, and this one there's a separation too.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I remember Ross Lansell once saying, 'As usual Elwyn Lynn's works'–you always remember the bad things, don't you? 'Elwyn Lynn's works lack a coherence'. But I think this is what it's about.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: This dispersal kind of thing, which is anyway pretty common in modern art, I think the collages are more dispersed, as in this drawing–not so much this one–you're getting a dispersal of things. You're also still getting a feeling about the surface. The paper–I don't know whether that one's done on–the paper that collage is done on there—

JAMES GLEESON: *Dundoo Hills*?

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, *Dundoo Hills*. That paper is imported from America and it's thick, very thick paper.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

ELWYN LYNN: It's beautiful paper. By the time I pay airfreight on it and the people catch me at customs, it comes out about $10 a sheet. So it sits there for a month before I'm game to touch it. But I think the surface of it is what intrigues me, you know. You can punch holes in that and it'd still look good, you know. This is done on a fairly thick paper, but not quite as thick, so the texture of the paper got very important, you know, for me. It still remained there and I think that with

the—this is a black kind of stain and this is raised white there, put it on straight out of the tube, if I remember rightly, across there. So there's a still a play of texture, and there's still a play of forms–groping, as it were, for forms. They're much, much freer.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, much.

ELWYN LYNN: I think that they've always been self-contained and the early *Winterscape* one there, for example, the forms are fairly free. But, you know, it is a bit like Miro put in prison for a while there. Isn't he, you know? Whereas these are much easier.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: In the flow and so on. And still the drip is there, you see.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: The drip is there in *Desert profile*, and the drip is in *Love's whirlpool*. So that it's still got this feeling to keep alive, as it were, the surface action and to keep things moving.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: In the *Dundoo Hills* we've got the drip running down from the top surrounding the–it's my cousin's place in the country, out of Junee, a little place called Illabo. As a matter of fact, their son who looks after the farm just got killed a couple of weeks ago in a car crash on the lonely roads. Usual thing, more people killed there.

JAMES GLEESON: We were talking about your nephew, was it, who was killed?

ELWYN LYNN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: He looked after this—

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, he was killed. He's a third cousin. He looked after this place, and that's a photograph out there at Dundoo Hills.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

ELWYN LYNN: My sister Rose, who was on the phone this morning, as a matter of fact, to see how things were, was very pleased to find out that the name of the farm where she lived for so long had entered the national collection. Very tickled. Oh, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Good, good.

ELWYN LYNN: Oh, yes. It's funny, the reverberations of these things that happen. Well, what have I got here? I've got a piece of the Declaration of Independence of America, I think. A facsimile thing rolled up in the middle, and a photograph of the grain shed and the storage shed at Dundoo Hills. All stained around with, oh, I think it's watercolour.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Then a facsimile–it's not a facsimile, it's a photograph–of an old document that interested me. Then I've got these little drawings in the background with a little joke in one where you see the tree through the side door on the hill that's out of kilter.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh yes. Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: They're kind of Nolan-esque things.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I just don't know. I think it's about testaments and wills and deeds and being in some way or other intrigued by the little town where I was brought up where I thought there were no artistic stimuli whatsoever. Maybe I'm not saying that any more. I took the photograph, by the way, that's my own photograph.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

ELWYN LYNN: I think that's—I'm not too certain. Of course, all the placements and all the tensions and all that, these are very carefully you know—

JAMES GLEESON: Calculated.

ELWYN LYNN: Calculated, yes. Where it opens up a little bit.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Let's the air there and so on, you know, where this one tightens up. You know, these shapes there and there, you know, in various areas where's there's untouched, have got sort of what we used to call plastic rhymes, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Would that have evolved from a drawing?

ELWYN LYNN: Oh, I would have worked this out just briefly first of all in a drawing, yes. I'd have calculated it somewhat. There are still accidents, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: The fact that this document is pasted over and let some of the other stains show through, that's important. I think that there's certain things that are hidden and then appear again. I think that's important. I think also that I had a number of these photographs of old documents, but this one was all creased in squares and that goes with the squares at the top, you know. Then I creased the other one in different kind of creases, as it were.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I suppose there's some reference to the landscape being a little creased as well and the trees, though they look a little child-like, nonetheless the

little smudgy dots you still pick up in the document here and elsewhere and so on. The shadows of the tree you can't see here on the shed are picked up, you know. Well, these are shadows of trees and these are shadows of the shadows of trees, as it were. I think there's those sort of things.

JAMES GLEESON: Linking.

ELWYN LYNN: Linking things, yes. A lot of this is very liberated at first, you know. You paint the big dark area then you put the photograph down. But then you start working. You have some of this material put out around you, then you start working pretty instinctively. As a matter of fact, once you get going, as it were, the best parts seem to me to come off instinctively, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I mean, to chop off how much of that document there by the other document, I don't think you can calculate this, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no, no.

ELWYN LYNN: The fact that this comes there and you've got another the thing there and another movement there, and this balances this other movement up there. I think all this is—well, you put it down and it looks right for a second.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I think that you've got to make your mind up pretty much.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Whereas I think in painting and other kinds of painting, you can alter it later on. It reminds me of Sidney Nolan's paintings on glass. He draws on the back of the glass, and then his first paint stroke is his last because you can't alter it.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no. No.

ELWYN LYNN: That's it.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: So Billy Rose used to say, 'You know, you get out there in that white'–or pale bluish white–'you're on your own', as it were. And you are. I think there's a sensibility that's acute to this, whereas I think in certain kinds of painting —well, impressionist painting like Monet who just simply put a little stroke. If it doesn't work you put another one cutting over it or something like this. A great field of alteration can go on all the time, all over, whereas with these things they're very final.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I think, you know, they're two distinct kinds of creativeness.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, I agree. Jack, for some future conservationist, conservators benefit, what sort of glue do you use?

ELWYN LYNN: I use mainly PVA glues.

JAMES GLEESON: PVA.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, polyvinyl acetate.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: And very rarely anything else.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

ELWYN LYNN: I have tried some wallpaper glue, a bit of that may be found in some of them. But I found it unsatisfactory and it doesn't seem to be consistent. Yes. Yes, I get the PVA from Boardman Chemicals of Wellington Street, Wellington Road, 46 Wellington Road, Granville. It's called Cascorex

JAMES GLEESON: Cascorex.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, and I think the formula number is 912.

JAMES GLEESON: That's a (inaudible) detail.

ELWYN LYNN: So they can tell you all about it.

JAMES GLEESON: Good.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, that's what I use. Yes. When there's pigment in the thick ones, it is usually a dry pigment mixed in. The paints are usually acrylics or house paints, house enamels. Oh, any kind of drawing and things like that are done with normal pencils or—

JAMES GLEESON: Crayon.

ELWYN LYNN: Crayons and so on. Oily crayons.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Craypas.

ELWYN LYNN: Craypas, things like that, and Carandash and things of that nature.

JAMES GLEESON: You use the best quality papers that will survive—

ELWYN LYNN: Oh well, yes, it's expensive stuff, but I've used the best quality paper. That's about it. They're fastened by down by PVA as well. It's not a recommended glue for fastening things down, but I've looked at it and seen what happened to it and it's very good, I think. I think there's no problem about it. As a matter of fact, nearly all these books on conservation and works on paper and so on are about experiments carried out, you know, 10 years ago. They're not very up-to-date in glues and so on.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, we've had a look at some of that problem.

JAMES GLEESON: Jack, these last two, the latest ones we've got, '76 and '77, are much more open, freer, lighter in texture, lighter in feeling. Is this a general tendency in your work at the moment?

ELWYN LYNN: Oh, yes, quite so. Yes. It's meant that I'm finding it rather difficult. I've got some canvases prepared but I'm finding it rather difficult to know what to do with the canvas. For this show, '77 show, I did two canvases, and the Art Gallery of New South Wales got one and Belgiorno-Nettis got one. They're very dispersed and open, you know. They just worry me a little bit still. You know, you can get it dispersed but you can also get it bitty.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I think it might be a little bitty, some of them. But I'm worried now about–I'm not worried but I'm just thinking–how I tackle it. I think I'd have to stop dispersing it so much and making it a bit more iconic, you know. Yes. But it's more open and free and light in touch and so on at the present time, you know. Who knows, the melancholy and lugubrious notes may descend again, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, Jack, could we turn now to one of your many other careers, first of all as a critic. You worked now for what newspaper and what years?

ELWYN LYNN: Well, I can't remember the years exactly, but we can get that from some documents. I worked for *The Mirror* for very, very briefly then I worked for *The Australian* at its inception for several years. Oh, I left them because they wanted me to share fortnight around with Charlie Bush. I felt, well, he runs a gallery, you know, and though he may have been very, very fair with his criticisms, I just didn't think that was the right thing to do and I took offence. Then I worked for *The Bulletin* for some time.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Then we agreed sort of to part at *The Bulletin*. It wasn't done with great finesse. They kept Nancy Borlase on after she'd relieved me and so on, so I didn't worry about that. Then I didn't write for anybody at all, but I wrote occasional pieces for *Art International* and for *Quadrant*. I still write an occasional piece for *Quadrant* but no direct criticisms at all. I write a few introductions, but no kind of weekly or fortnight criticism at all.

JAMES GLEESON: Jack, do you have any theory about the role of the critic? I ask this because I remember once having a discussion with Donald Brook, and Donald was adamant that the role that the critic played, or should play, was a very active one. That he should shape the way art should go. That he should impose what he believed to be the best kind of art and try and force through criticism artists to take that dimension.

ELWYN LYNN: Well, that theory also led here at the institute to people saying that critics do play this role and have played role and they have pushed art in certain directions. And actually that theory precedes practice in the Marxist terms.

That theory and practice, well, theory of the critic is important, and this has been espoused by my next door neighbour here Terry Smith a great deal. I just think it's quite untrue, and I don't think that art is shaped in this way at all. I think that critics have got a duty to point out what they think is best. They've got a duty to say where they feel there might be a wrong direction.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: They may be able to say, 'Well, all this art is purely decorative', or 'All this art is just anecdotal'. They may be able to say that. But nonetheless I think that a critic up to a point must be something of a reporter, but I don't think he has to report every show. But I think that in being a reporter, it's the amount of emphasis he gives that's important. Whereas with Donald, I think the best shows, what he thought was the best show, was the show that was a sort of a launching pad for his ideas.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: So that he could talk about the ideas. If it produced ideas in him–you know, a very subjective sort of thing–it was all right. But I think that hard looking and coming to grips with what you might think is a person's individual contribution is the important thing to do.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, I agree absolutely.

ELWYN LYNN: I think unless you do this, you're going to miss a lot. Now, I think it's very sad if people like only abstract painting or realist painting or something like that. They're missing a lot of the pleasures, the visual pleasures of the world. So I don't—anyway, we've seen too many critics, or people who set themselves up as guides. You'd think the example in the totalitarian countries would be enough for people to see, 'Well, be very careful of anybody who wants to be your guide and mentor of what is appropriate and what is not'. Of course, Donald had theories that there was no real thing as aesthetics; that there are certain things that are admirable in a certain social context. A theory that would get him into difficulties, I think. Yes, I think that maybe I just don't think critics are going to be leaders and that's it. As a matter of fact, art has got on in the past very well without them and without a lot of other things too, like frequent one-man shows and so on. But I think that what a critic can do at times is communicate a certain enthusiasm, or he may condemn something. The other side of the coin is that you should be enthusiastic about other things. I think that what's happened in criticism is I don't find much enthusiasm any more. Now, you may say, 'Well, you know, that criticism should be more phenomenological, that it should describe just what's there and not too much'. But I think that people go to Europe and visit the big great museums to get enthusiastic if they can.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I see that with Mary Eagle and people like that on *The Age*, even with old Alan McCulloch, you know. The old breed, there's no excitement very much. They don't write in such a way that you'd say, 'Well, I think I might see this one. This is pretty good', you know. Nancy's a bit inclined to give you a little bit of past history every time of the artist, where it came from and place the artist in his own past and give a passing opinion on the quality of the work. But you never quite, well, you don't stop what you're doing on Saturday afternoon and say,

'We'd better go to Paddington and look at the galleries'. I think that's what's occurred and I think that maybe there's been a lot of questioning of the enthusiasts, but I think it's not there. But then also I think that without showing too much enthusiasm you can write as though the thing is extremely important.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: You know, a sentence like, 'Never in recent years has the dangers of certain attitudes been so well demonstrated in these satires by so and so'. Immediately you write a sentence like that people say, 'Ah, you know, this must be pretty good', you know. Then you go on and describe what the satire's about or something like that, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. What do you think of the French practice of some years back of trying to create sort of prose, the equivalent of the sensations of the works?

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, very difficult. I think sometimes you might like to do that. I think you can do that. I think that if you're describing a Courbet wave—I saw Courbet the other day on television.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes. I did too.

ELWYN LYNN: If you saw this gigantic wave coming down endlessly beating on the surf, you know, well, I think then you might be able to let yourself go a little bit about that. I think, see nothing wrong with that.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

ELWYN LYNN: They might want to call it impressionist criticism or something like that, but nothing wrong with it at all. But then at other times I think it's a good idea to tell them. There are 26 pictures in the show and they nearly all deal with waves beating on the land. Though one might feel this is becoming monotonous, by the end of it you're so submerged you come out feeling quite damp. I think that there's room for it. Oh, yes, I think so. Well, there's different ways to read a poem. You can read an old ballad about Edward Edward with feeling or you can read it very flatly.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I think you could write about that poem and you could analyse the poem. But I think that you can write about the sudden change in feeling in the poem when you realise the mother had instructed the son to kill the father and so on. Such counsel as ye gave me, oh. Well, the sudden shift, I think you've got really to describe this. You've got to use a language that's not just factual and analytical. It's a problem for people. You can't do it exactly.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

ELWYN LYNN: That's faking. But I think the other extreme the French go in for is belles-lettres-ism.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: They just simply dodge around and say quaint little things about it, you know. But, of course, then were the conceptualists. It's the principal idea that's embodied that's the main thing and so their language is pretty bare and stark.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, Jack, now, critic, writer of books.

ELWYN LYNN: Oh, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: How many have you done? What ones now?

ELWYN LYNN: What did I do? I did the early book on Sidney Nolan, *Myth and Imagery*. I did a small book on drawing for Longmans, which was just a little picture book and mainly abstract expressionist drawings or people of that nature, though it had a Charlie Blackman and an Arthur Boyd in it, and a very early Sidney Nolan in it as well. Then I did the Nolan book and then I did this landscape book, which is *The Australian landscape and its artists*. The title suggested by the publishers, present wave of nationalism and all that kind of thing. I got rather interested in the landscape and I really came to the conclusion Australian landscape painters are not bad, compared with others in the world. There aren't many good landscape painters. I did that with a commentary opposite each work and so on. Then I'm working at present–supposed to be arriving any day, a sample or two–on a book called *Sidney Nolan – Australia*, then further down you see, Elwyn Lynn, Sidney Nolan, and it's got a lot of comments by Sid.

JAMES GLEESON: Ah huh.

ELWYN LYNN: But the comments are very brief. Sometimes opposite a painting there'll only be about four lines, because I'm becoming more and more convinced that people read less and less. The people who are getting attracted to art are not just art historians, you know, that art is just not for art historians.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no.

ELWYN LYNN: It's for many other people and we're getting many people, well, in the world of technology, whether it's manufacturing technology or whether it's computer technology, who simply are interested in the arts and feel they're lacking something but they're not going to read miles and miles of stuff. Still, you know, I mean we've got to tell them something. So in this book we've got all the works about Australia. Out of about a hundred or so pages of paintings, we've got about 12 pages that dealt with paintings he did last year, was it? Oh, I think it was last year, 1978.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Who's publishing?

ELWYN LYNN: Here in Australia, and it's publishing by Bay Books again.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

ELWYN LYNN: Who did the landscape book and did the Laurie Thomas book that time.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: They, and they've done the Whiteley book as well.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: They've got a book supposed to be being done by Patrick McCaughey on Fred Williams, but long in the gestation period, very long. They're serious publishers to a point, you know what I mean.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: So I've got that one going and that suits me for the time being. Oh, I might do a small thing on Marea Gazzard. That's in the air.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: That's enough, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: It would halt your other activities.

ELWYN LYNN: The dreary checking of all these things, you see. It gets too much like checking all the stuff that comes into the Power and measuring it. You know, the business it gets very tedious and so on. Of course, all that work in there, if you're not careful, becomes a substitute for real creative thinking. It's much easier to sit down for hours and just check things, yes, however tiring it is, and then to switch then to do a bit of writing or something like that. Yes, so this book is coming and it's quite a different book from anything else because I quote critics and I quote about particular works, and I quote Sid when he's quotable. Sometimes he's not so quotable. He's got an early portrait of Max Harris there and he said, 'Yes, that's a portrait of Max Harris. I painted him then as a young clown. If I painted him now, I'd paint him as an old clown'. If I say to Sid, 'That's a bit rough, what about a jester?', and he said, 'Oh well, a jester without a court (inaudible)'. He's sick of Max Harris.

JAMES GLEESON: He has a sharp tongue.

ELWYN LYNN: The prolonged–well, it was more than a honeymoon–the sort of wedding is all over. Marriage is over, finished. So there a few things in it like that, but it's got a rather erudite introduction and it's got very detailed biography at the back, and that's it.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, good.

ELWYN LYNN: It's essentially a lecture book, and it's got the 25 Kelly ones in there.

JAMES GLEESON: The original ones?

ELWYN LYNN: The original ones, yes, they're there. As well as a lot of other things, and some things I'd not seen, you know. Some of the illustrations in my first book on Nolan I'd never seen until the book came out.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

ELWYN LYNN: I didn't know they were going to be there. But this is the Irish in Sid.

JAMES GLEESON: Is he good to work with?

ELWYN LYNN: Oh yes, but if we were having this interview now we'd be on to Irish literature by this time, deep in it. Or we'd have read a poem to one another or something. We'd be watching the Thames, when he used to live at Putney, go this way and go that way and the surge of history and how the Australian Ambassador to Ireland, when Sid had his retrospective there, were saying to Sid, 'The Celtic people are the ones. They're going to come up from Australia, right through'. Sid said, 'And they're going to come from Ireland and Scotland right in and the Celtic civilisation is spreading. You're going to meet someone near Dusseldorf'. You talk about that instead of getting on with the things. When I look at my notes, you know, in three hours talk you get very little down. He romances a little with me, you know, and I think he invents things. We're crossing the bridge at Putney and he said, 'That's where they arrested Christie'. I said, 'Where?'. 'Just there', he said, 'That's the place, that's where he accosted the policeman and said I'm Christie. And that's where he used to have his miserable cups of coffee, just there. And that is the old church where they sat him down and talked about whether a king of England could be executed. The Cromwellians, met there'. So when I'm crossing the same bridge with Sid again about two years later with the Cologne critic, Werner Kruger, I said, 'That's where they arrested Christi and that's where he used to have his cups of tea, didn't they Sid?'. Sid is quite silent. I said, 'And the Cromwellians met there'. 'That's right, the Cromwellians met there'. All the other had been a fantasy.

JAMES GLEESON: Incredible.

ELWYN LYNN: There's a lot of that. When I was with him in Paris he said, 'That's where Picasso met so and so'. But he knows the people Picasso met.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: But he just invents the places. You know, 'We're going down to Boulevard Miche', and after a bit you start to think, oh. You say, 'No more Sid, no more, please'.

JAMES GLEESON: It makes writing about him a little bit difficult.

ELWYN LYNN: Very difficult.

JAMES GLEESON: Sifting the truth from the fancy.

ELWYN LYNN: I get a wrong date at times. I've had wrong dates and he said, 'I mislead you a little there, to tell you the truth. I didn't paint that in New York now I come to think of it, you know'. But most of the time he's pretty factual. But, you know, even this goes on the tape. He says, 'What has Cynthia written there? Nineteen forty-seven. Nonsense. I'll show you the penny trick'. He puts his hand in his pocket, pulls out a penny, and the back of the masonite where this is on, he rubs it out with a penny. You just scrape it off, you see. He writes, instead of '46 he puts '47 or '45, whatever he thinks it ought to be. There's no argument about it. But I think he's pretty right about the dates.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Because he's had to think a lot about it you know. He's always carried his own retrospective with him, as it were. He's always got a lot of pictures put away.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: So I think that factually that's all right. But it's always, oh, you know, well he invents things and he has fun and so he's very—

JAMES GLEESON: It must be a pleasure to work with him though. I mean, imagine trying to write a book a book about John Passmore, for instance.

ELWYN LYNN: It would be awful. Oh, you couldn't.

JAMES GLEESON: You couldn't.

ELWYN LYNN: Oh no, you couldn't. He'd say, 'Why do you say that? Do you think this is serious?'. Sid's full of stories. But you pick up a lot with Sid. You need to go around with him when he goes into town and all this kind of thing, and jot things down and so on. When you ask him about his first marriage to a girl called Elizabeth, he gets off that a great deal. Finally you would say, 'Well, you better just tell me and get it over with', you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: That's OK. He also paintings that turn up that you've never seen. You wouldn't imagine he'd have ever painted them. They come out from somewhere, you know. So he's not easy to write about. I think it's almost impossible to write the story of Sidney Nolan, to tell you the truth. I've been digging around for a long time, I've got yards of stuff.

JAMES GLEESON: There's so much of it.

ELWYN LYNN: Well, I went over to Wahroonga and got these things out that Joe Brown is showing from–when it is?–today on.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: In Melbourne. Dozens and dozens of them.

JAMES GLEESON: From that house he used to live in?

ELWYN LYNN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: They were stored there?

ELWYN LYNN: I went in there with my young assistant and Lily, the daughter, and we got permission and we broke the canite down and out they came. They constitute nearly all–this is Joe Brown's catalogue. He'll probably sending you one. They constitute a great deal of these things in here.

JAMES GLEESON: Goodness.

ELWYN LYNN: All tucked away up there. All these ones on glass, you know, never seen before.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

ELWYN LYNN: So we brought them back and gave them a bit of dust down and then restored and then they were sent down to Joe Brown, much to the chagrin of Mr Komon. Oh, I don't think I'll ever be able to face him again. But I can't help that; the competition between dealers being legitimate in capitalism. But I think he'd be ropeable. So he had them stored there you see.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

ELWYN LYNN: He didn't touch them. Then after Cynthia suicided he didn't want to go out there. Oh, yes, all that's very difficult.

JAMES GLEESON: Is he coming out?

ELWYN LYNN: Next March.

JAMES GLEESON: Next March.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, he'll have an exhibition next March, the 7th of March, I think, at Rudy Komon's. Because that's 1980, and 1880, about the 11th November, Ned Kelly was hanged. I said to Sid, 'But March you're having the show'. 'Well, he said, 'Get in early'. He said, 'They'll all be out and about at the end of the year celebrating or something or other the hanging of—

JAMES GLEESON: Ned.

ELWYN LYNN: Ned, yes. So he said, 'I'll do Kelly with a difference', and that's ominous to hear him say this. He rings up about once every 10 days. That's ominous to hear that, 'with a difference'. You think, God, what's going to come now?

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes. This will be the fourth time isn't it?

ELWYN LYNN: Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: The fourth sort of series that he's done?

ELWYN LYNN: I think so. It'll be the fourth series of Kelly, yes. Well, I hope he does it and gets onto something like that because he's been a bit lost, you know. Oh well, you know, his attitude is, you know. He will stare and stare and stare at a Morris Lewis. Several times he's come over to the big art fairs in Cologne with me and one to Dusseldorf. He came to Berlin with me in '77 and saw the big show in Berlin, you know. But he's a great looker of things, a greater taker in. Between looking at a Morris Lewis and what he's getting out of it, wherever it will appear again, you'll never see how it could appear, but there's something kind of fuelling up, you know, and he goes to the theatre a great deal and to music a great deal.

JAMES GLEESON: He was a friend of Benjamin Britton's, wasn't he? He did quite a few based on—

ELWYN LYNN: Quite a friend, quite a close friend of Benjamin Britton's, yes, and fairly friendly with Peter Peers but there was always a bit of sort of rivalry there. Peter Peers is the great singer and he's the great artist and Benjamin is the great king, you know. I think at times he and Peter sort of endured one another's witticisms, you know. Yes.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, he's a good friend. Yes, oh yes. He's a good friend of Lord Clark's, Kenneth Clark's. About a week ago he went to Kenneth Clark's 75th birthday. Ken Clark married again.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: So Sid thought that that was good enough. If he can marry again, I can marry again, despite the recriminations of Patrick White who didn't approve of his marrying so quickly. It's funny how the bourgeois comes out in these dedicated revolutionaries, isn't it? But he's good to go to shows with. 'Look at that. Look at that there. Look at that Beckman. Look at the pimp. Jesus Christ boy, look at this. Come over here'.

JAMES GLEESON: He'll say.

ELWYN LYNN: Oh, yes. That's good, you know. It's quite different from going with other people. You can go around with the knockers. Or you can go around with Patrick McCaughey who'll talk about the frontality and the overall immediacy of the picture, you know, and that's it all the time. Still.

JAMES GLEESON: Jack, now what? Well, the tape for one. We'll change the tape.

JAMES GLEESON: Jack, two aspects still to be touched on: your work with The Power.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes. Well, I used to teach down the road, the Cleveland Street Boys High School. Some people had said to me, 'Why don't you put in for this curator's job?'. The first time I put in, you know, I just got a message back, 'You've not been successful'. So then I came and saw the vice-chancellor and he said, 'Why didn't you apply the second time?', and I said, 'Well, I only applied the first time as a matter of form to please a number of people'. So he said, 'Would you apply again?'. So I said to the headmaster one day, 'I've got to go up to the university'. 'Got the last period off?'. I said, 'Yes'. He said, 'Righto'. I said, 'A bit of a job'. He said, 'Good luck'. I came up and I met these 10 professors. As a matter of fact, I've learnt something about life, a little bit. That if you want a thing too hard, you often don't get it. If you're a little bit, well, you're not going to push things too much.

JAMES GLEESON: (inaudible) comes off.

ELWYN LYNN: It comes off, yes. It's a strange thing. So then I got it and I started travelling and I went abroad in 1969.

JAMES GLEESON: That was the first?

ELWYN LYNN: The first one. Then the next one was 1970. Then it was ’72, ’74, ’76 and ’78. Each time I went on those trips to America and Europe, but in the meantime I went on two other trips, I think three other trips. I went to Thailand once to explain why we broke some of their crockery and their statues, although we didn’t damage them very much. In between times I’ve been on other trips, and so we haven’t had very much to spend. What’s happened is that one buys and one exhibits where one can, and usually in the Art Gallery of New South Wales–impossible this year because of the renovations.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: First of all there were some difficulties here. There were some misunderstandings within the university and outside. I think that we were buying a kind of a teaching aid collection. That is, it would be for helping people in their teaching, and this had to be relevant more or less to the theories. Well, you know, I mean if it were to illustrate the theories already existing—this is part of what we were talking about before. There was a certain amount of leaning on by people like Dr Brooke, now Professor Brooke, and to a certain extent by his acolytes.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: In order to give an account of what one was buying and do this and do that and do the other. But in the end their role in the institute was defined. We’ve got the institute and it’s got a library and a gallery and it’s got a teaching department.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: As Professor William O’Neill pointed out, that certain people here were members of the institute in virtue of the fact that they were teachers and some were curators and some were librarians. But this didn’t give them the right to interfere with other sections at all, and it had to be ironed out. There’s no question that people wanted to bring it pretty strictly under control here. Professor Smith let it ride for a while and then I think he gave them more or less the facts of life that he is in charge. Bernard interfered very little at all. He bought a few things. At the beginning he bought some and he bought a few things afterwards.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: But he didn’t interfere very much and very rarely. As a matter of fact, he had no direction whatsoever. Not even saying, ‘I think this is an interesting one you should look up when you’re abroad’. Nothing like that at all, you see. Of course, what really happens is that we haven’t got enough money to buy anything rather expensive. So what happens is you buy young people who are usually unknown and, in many cases, have not even been in the magazines or been reviewed, or if they’ve been reviewed they haven’t been illustrated. Quite frequently you do buy them and you find that soon afterwards they’re illustrated. Not always. It’s rather nice to see that. So you conclude that your taste is impeccable or bad taste is universal. It’s a bit hard to tell. And the purchasing is not easy. But there’s no doubt about it, that if you’re interested in contemporary art and you go amongst people rather than the big dealers–but even the big dealers like Andre Emerich and, I suppose, the Manager of the Rowan Galleries,

Alex Gregory Hood–you meet these people and though they're in the big time, they've still got some real enthusiasms about what they're showing. It sort of spins off and it becomes rather mutual and a happy situation. But you do a tremendous amount of looking. You learn to judge a gallery very quickly by what's on there. Sometimes you're wrong but nearly always you can say, 'Well, this gallery wouldn't have much in the stock room'. You get the feeling, you know. You could be wrong but you've got to do it very quickly. I usually have to spend about a month in New York. I don't think I could do it under a month. I tried it three weeks last year and it was insufficient time. Oh, you do London in about 10 days and you do Cologne in five. Other places, make side trips to various places and it's a lot of legwork and it's three months.

JAMES GLEESON: It's Strenuous.

ELWYN LYNN: It's strenuous.

JAMES GLEESON: Jack, sorry to interrupt.

ELWYN LYNN: Go on.

JAMES GLEESON: Do you deal mainly through dealers or do you go to studios?

ELWYN LYNN: I go to studios frequently, more now than I used to. Some dealers have taken me to studios, especially to artists whom they're not showing for some time to come.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Because I've got a few contacts, especially in New York which is the main place.

JAMES GLEESON: It still is the main place?

ELWYN LYNN: And in Los Angeles. I've been to studios in Los Angeles and New York mainly, yes. I think give Paris another five years and we might see something there. I'm not certain. But by knowing a few artists living there now, they take me to studios, but especially minor artists who are enthusiastic. I've got a couple of Australians living over there called Edwards, Marjorie Edwards. Her husband's a medical man. They recommend people to me. I've been to a few places that way. But then it spins off a little bit and you'll get other people saying, 'You ought to come and see, ought to go and see so and so's work', and that occurs. That's very time consuming, visiting the studios, because it'll take three quarters of the day. Whereas in and out of a gallery doesn't take so long at all.

JAMES GLEESON: But you're probably unique in this country in having your finger on the pulse of the young movements, the young artists all over the world.

ELWYN LYNN: Well, you get a good idea of the young artists, yes. It's wasn't so easy this last year.

JAMES GLEESON: It wasn't?

ELWYN LYNN: No. Because what's happened with the recession all over the Western world and in America is that, as they do in Australia, the dealers are more inclined to look to the sure fire thing.

JAMES GLEESON: Well established, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes. Down in Soho in New York, of course, they still show really experimental work.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: But not quite as much. A little bit circumspect. Maybe this is a sign of the times, but I think they're being a bit careful.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Consequently, the younger artist is not being shown so readily as he was, and the risky artist is not being shown so readily. They do occasionally but I think it's less than it used to be. That's my impression. Though you couldn't say that is so true of New Yorkers as of other places. But in London, for example, to find a good young experimental artist is almost impossible. When I asked the dealers about it, they explained to me. Well, not all of them in the same way, but it amounts to this. They say it's taken us years to get the stable together. Our stable has become partly international. We go to the international trade shows. All we can do is look after the old horses in the stable, and that's it.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: If a brilliant new young person came along, we hope to God a brilliant young new dealer would come along to look after him. So some of them predict a new wave of dealers in five, six years time.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

ELWYN LYNN: They'll come along and these new people will emerge through the dealers. I think this could be so.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Well, it's logical.

ELWYN LYNN: It's logical. I think if you take Alex Gregory Hood. To send the Bridget Riley stuff to America, then to Australia and then over to Tokyo, is a time consuming business and gives you very little time to do a great deal. I said to him, you know, I said, 'What if you've got a person who's always bought from your gallery and he comes in and says, "Haven't you got a nice big drawing by some young hopeful"', you know. I said, 'You haven't got anything, have you?'. And Annerley Juder, she had nothing either. She had a couple of young people, but not much, not much. I point this out to her. They look a bit worried about it, because that first fine rapture's gone, you know. They're in the big den game and so on. So that makes it a bit difficult.

JAMES GLEESON: Does this mean that now more and more you're intending to go to studios looking—

ELWYN LYNN: It would be. It would be. In London I would go to more studios if I could have the contacts. But that's a bit difficult.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: That's where knowing Sid and going around with Sid does make life so easy. It would be nice to break off and define some younger people. But that's rather difficult too.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: A lot of them are not very good. There's no question about it. Some of the dealers have said to me, 'You find them and we'll look at them'. In New York, after I'd been buying a few things several years ago, one of the assistant dealers said to me, 'Have you seen anything good?'. I thought he meant am I buying something from other people and not buying from him.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I said, 'Well, you've got some good things here, of course, you know'. He said, 'No, no, no. I mean have you spotted anything?'.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

ELWYN LYNN: He said, 'We're too busy to spot anything. We don't get around enough'.

JAMES GLEESON: I can understand that

ELWYN LYNN: He said, 'We haven't got the time'. In their day off they don't go down to Soho foraging around. It's a lot of grapevine stuff goes on and who's good and who's not good. Not as much I suppose as—because it's bigger and it's more complex.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: But I also found that Cologne was unadventurous this time and I said to the Vintersburger Gallery, you know, 'Have you got any young people?'. Well, they just really didn't have any. Then there they expressed an unease about the situation. Of course, a lot of young artists have gone into video, into theatre environments and performances. Some of them have got religion. Some of them have gone into politics. Some are disgusted with the commercialisation of art and have dropped out. Also it maybe there's not so many people around with the talent. Maybe that's occurred. It doesn't last very long. Probably disappear in no time and you'll see other talented people come along.

JAMES GLEESON: You think there's more sprinters about than long distance runners.

ELWYN LYNN: I think so. Yes, maybe. A bit difficult.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes. Jack, you mentioned Los Angeles as one of the interesting places to visit. Has that happened fairly recently?

ELWYN LYNN: Fairly recently, and it's not La Cienega Boulevard. It's Santa Monica and out towards a place they call Venice, because a madman built some canals there once and they've got a beach there that any healthy Australian would sneer at, you know. I've been taken there. I get taken there by a girl called Lyn Kienholz, who's Ed Kienholz's ex wife. She's run me to a few of these places. Otherwise I'd never get there because, first of all, Los Angeles, you can't get around.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, I know.

ELWYN LYNN: And if you can't drive, if you're not game to drive. The other thing you've got to know the people and so on. So that Los Angeles is all right. But, oh dear, you know—

JAMES GLEESON: The West Coast is a more important centre now than San Francisco?

ELWYN LYNN: I think it is, yes. There's more money around. It's scattered money. But, you know, it's scattered from Beverley Hills right down to Hollywood and all over, and there's a lot of money there. Of course, a lot of awful antique shops and so on. It's gone up and down a little bit there. But I think it might be just moving up a bit. San Francisco is much smaller.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, of course.

ELWYN LYNN: It's never been quite the big time at all that Los Angeles has been.

JAMES GLEESON: No.

ELWYN LYNN: But, you see, in America, I think Chicago, you're wasting your time going there. Boston has got a few things but not much. So it's New York and even Washington with a lot of people coming and going and a great number of public servants have got nothing much to do, I suppose. It's only started to improve a little bit recently, and its New York is the centre. Max Hutchison, of course, has his two galleries in New York, Sculpture Now Incorporated and the Max Hutchison Painting Gallery. But he's also got one in Houston and the Houston one didn't move.

JAMES GLEESON: Didn't it?

ELWYN LYNN: No. What I was saying before about all these great technocrats and so on, they didn't move in Houston, and he said, 'Jeez, they think it's another bloody museum. The stuff's for sale. How can I prove it to them?', you know. So he said it will take a year and he was talking about showing Sidney Nolan there. But he said, 'You tell Sid' he said, 'Not for a year'. He said, 'I just can't get them to buy'. They'll buy Steuben glass and things like that, you know, tremendous, all that. And it's very wealthy, there's a lot of money there. But the real Texans, others will fly up to New York and buy, and they just don't seem to want to buy there. But he's sold sculpture around the place and various things but he says the strangest part of it is that in the deep South there, that he can sell in New Orleans, he can sell in other places simply because he has a gallery in Houston.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: The fact that he has a gallery in Houston is a sort of bona fide.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

ELWYN LYNN: He's put his money into the south, as it were, but not in Houston. He thought it would go well and it didn't go so well, and he's losing money on it. He gives it another two years, he says. But you know what Max is like; Gallery A in Melbourne, Gallery A in Sydney, then New York and so on. He's restless. After a while he's built a thing up he needs something else. But New York is undoubtedly the centre of activities, yes.

JAMES GLEESON: Jack, what's the future of The Power collection?

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, now, the Power collection and its future. Well, the plans down near the Seymour Centre for the Gallery have been approved by the City Council, you know, two or three years ago. They had a million dollars. A million dollars is not enough. Now, what can one say about this? Well, I suppose one could lay it on the line. Put it this way. Professor Smith did all he possibly could to get an eminent architect. He wanted Harry Seidler, and Alan Jack and Cottier have got the thing. I may be quite wrong in this. I think that maybe Bernard was a bit dispirited after that. Then I think he was interested in many other things, a multiplicity of things. I feel that if he and some others had been more orientated towards raising money, they could have raised it. Now, I don't think that Bernard wants to raise. That's his attitude. I think that the university people here have got many, many irons in the fire, and they've got to raise money for all kinds of things. There's all kinds of scholarships have slipped out of sight and research work has gone because of lack of money. I think the university is not particularly geared to raising money, not Australian universities. But I do think now in retrospect that what should have happened maybe, instead of waiting for the money to come from somewhere or other, that I myself or somebody should have said, 'Right, we'll get out there and we'll get the money'. I think we can still do this, and I think the present professor is thinking on those lines.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

ELWYN LYNN: We must raise the money. There's a tremendous shortage of space in Sydney. It's the worst city in Australia in many ways.

JAMES GLEESON: For space.

ELWYN LYNN: For space, and we should do something. In the meantime, we're getting a converted building called the Madson Building, just over here. It used to be the old Standards Laboratory. We'll have a fairly large area in that. I think it would be about twice as big as the Ivan Dougherty Gallery under Alexander Mackie. I think we can use that, and that will be this year. At least we can show some works.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Quite frankly here–and I can say this I think without any equivocation–what's happened here was that the students used to come up under a system, and with it you didn't see the Power stuff on the seventh floor. The last 18 months we've had one student, except my fourth years are doing museology come up there. I think this is because the prevailing ideology amongst

some of the first year tutors–that's Terry Smith and Mr Ian Burn–is that these imports are imperialist, culturally imperialist, and their brainwashing by the powers that be overseas. Ian Burn, in the first issue of *Fox* magazine printed in New York, it's an art language magazine, Volume 1, Number 1, talked about the crazed thinking behind two Australian collections. He gave me about three lines and he gave the National Gallery the rest of it and tipped the bucket on them; that is, that they are only taking in, you know, capitalist American kind of art, et cetera, et cetera, all part of the big deal. Since that time they would argue, of course, that their courses no longer need the students to look up top. But even if their courses are against that imperialism–and they're very Marxist, of course, in first year here–even if they were against it they ought to see, you know, the evidence, but the evidence is not presented. The new professor is very aware of that. She feels that the courses next year certainly will include those visits. Well, I think it's scandalous that first year fine arts under the aegis of Dr Power, who's said to bring to the Australian public the most recent thoughts and works of contemporary art, that they don't even know the gallery is there. As a matter of fact, one girl who came up last year, came up and said to my assistant, 'I didn't know this gallery existed, but I saw Mr Lynn on television talking about Jackson Pollock', which is a dreadful way to get people up into a gallery.

JAMES GLEESON: Jack, someone just yesterday or the day before started the idea of The Power Institute taking over the Bonython, the old Bonython Gallery and developing that as a—

ELWYN LYNN: Yes, it's a good idea. It's a very expensive building now.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, but still it would be less than buildings starting from scratch, wouldn't it?

ELWYN LYNN: Well, you know, the idea that it ought to be close to the campus.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, was an important one.

ELWYN LYNN: Was an idea that grew up at one stage. But personally I don't think it has to be any more close to the campus than the law school. The law school's near the courts and that's where the action is. And if the action's in Paddington or in the neighbourhood—

JAMES GLEESON: That's where the art action is, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes. Or in the neighbourhood of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, that wouldn't worry me.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no.

ELWYN LYNN: I mean, the idea of putting it down in a warehouse down on the harbour, no, no, no.

JAMES GLEESON: No, no.

ELWYN LYNN: Not at all. Some other place. The good thing about the Seymour Centre would be that it would probably stay open till 8 o'clock at night until the performance started.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Then, you know, that would be five nights a week or six nights a week. I don't know where they'd find the money to pay the overtime, you know. There's all these minor matters with overtime and things like that, you know. You know the bureaucracy, you've got one tea lady to serve so many people, but she's got to have her holidays. So you've got to have two tea ladies really. So you've got to have more staff to justify the tea lady, really.

JAMES GLEESON: Well, Jack, now your last activity, Chairman of the Visual Arts Board.

ELWYN LYNN: Yes. Well, Chairman of the Visual Arts Board. Well, I came into the Visual Arts Board when the foundations very well laid and the practices were very well laid and all set out. I came in there after the Whitlam Government had been defeated. The result was that though the money wasn't cut short by the government, the same money pretty much was given to the Visual Arts Board.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: So really no great initiatives much could be undertaken. In all these organizations there's a certain routine thing of giving grants. We varied the money on the grant, we varied the nature of the grants to a certain extent, but it very much remained as it was before. They started some art purchasing in a minor way, which I think is all right.

JAMES GLEESON: What happens to those purchases?

ELWYN LYNN: The purchases are nearly all distributed to colleges of advanced education (inaudible). But I still think that it needs to be looked at, and there's no list and there's no brochure out yet. I think if it's got to justify itself, they must do that. The other thing is that we dropped out of Sao Paulo but we moved a lot to get an exhibition in at the last Venice Biennale, which was very well received indeed and has established us there in a most unequivocal way. I think that's a great step in the right direction.

JAMES GLEESON: How was that resolved, because the government was all against building a building?

ELWYN LYNN: Oh, well.

JAMES GLEESON: How did you manage that?

ELWYN LYNN: Oh, we just got it from the Italians. They let us have a piece and they'll let us have a piece again in the future.

JAMES GLEESON: Oh, I see. Australia didn't actually build a pavilion?

ELWYN LYNN: Oh no, no, no. But it's good that we're established there and I think it's important. The studio in New York has been at its vicissitudes–still is–but it's been a boon to many a young person going there. That's very important. The VAB cooperates with the university on the Paris studio, the Power Paris studio, and pays the fares of people if they need fares going there, whoever gets it. So that's important as well. We've changed the business of giving a certain

percentage of money of works of art bought by galleries. Now they make a request according to their needs and they specify what they want to buy and we just simply look at it and say, 'Well, that's what they want to buy. We think that's pretty good'. First of all, the policy under John Bailey and yourself was to get them to think about buying more Australian art. Now our policy is to get them to think more about buying living Australian artists, but more policy directed.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: That's all it means. We continue to assist a great deal in helping the AGDC, though we want a little more emphasis on Australian art and we might tie part of the grant for that purpose.

JAMES GLEESON: I see.

ELWYN LYNN: We feel that it would be good for the morale of the Australian artist to see some shows going around. They needed the Chinese show, the El Dorado show, they needed all those, but I think that they need to see something about the creativity of this place itself, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: I mean, the thematic show seems to be the thing elsewhere. I think of shows like the Expressionist Impulse or the Constructivist Impulse or, if you like, the Surreal Impulse in Australian art or something or the weird country kind of thing from early topographers to later surrealists and so on. I think these are themes that could be done. I've mentioned this and the Director of the National Gallery of Victoria says, 'Well, we'll have to get our curators geared to it'. When he took over he felt that they'd been so robbed of initiative for a long time for various reasons, whatever they may be. He felt that they had to be brought back into activity again.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: To make the curators much more active in devising shows and so on it was very important. I think we might do this slowly and getting them thinking about their policies of purchase. I think the director of the gallery has then got to turn to his curator and say, 'Look, what's our policy? Let's work something out'. They've done that. The public art program that is giving money for putting up bits of sculpture here and there, that's worked extremely well and still continues to do so. I think that we could look at publishing a little more. We have assisted a new book coming out by Gary Catalano on *Criticism and art changes between the Antipodean Manifesto and the Field*. That book has been published by Oxford University Press. I think we've assisted–I was away at the time–I'm sure we've assisted Humphrey McQueen's book, *The Black Swan of Trespass*. It's supposed to be coming out apparently. I don't know what it's like. I think it's how to teach Marxism to people faintly interested in Australian art, you know. You know, they make satires here. *Honi soit* printed a satire uncovering the Marxist on the canvas, you know. It says, you know, they headed each place 'Fine arts, question 1. Write what you know of the class struggle but with some reference to the fine arts'. That's a bit of Humphrey McQueen's too, I think. We've assisted in that one and I think we've assisted in certain catalogues. I think we could do a bit more in the publishing thing. Oh yes, and there's a book been printed in honour

of Professor Smith with the various essays by everybody excluding me and we've assisted in that.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: So that I think that's a slightly new thing. But you find it's very difficult to build up too much that's new. We've tried to get going an architectural board, an architecture and design board. It's not about ordinary design. It's about design and architecture for, you know, the community for living and so on.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: And to improve people's attitude to these things. We've met a tremendous amount of opposition on the council. No-one on the council voted for it. They all voted against it. They voted for a panel, a little panel under the Visual Arts Board, if we can find the money, et cetera. Well, I think the minister wants the board and we've had quite a battle. Certain recriminations went on and so on, you know. Oh, I just felt that at one stage when they decided they'd write a letter to the minister pointing out all the reasons why a board was undesirable, I wrote to the minister and said, 'Well, you know, this is not very good'. Then I sent a copy of the letter to them.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Of course, when I go into the meeting after lunch the letter's all tabled and so on. Even suggested I resign, as somebody said, and I said, 'Oh' you know. I said to the minister, I said, 'they're seven years old and they've got arteriole sclerosis already'. So he didn't say to me, 'Oh now, come Mr Lynn, they're a serious group of people'. He just laughed. John Andrews, the architect, he's the head of this and he's a forthright bloke, you know. I said to the minister, 'Well, John will talk about it'. I said, 'I found that their attitude to change is amazing', the sclerosis bit and John Andrews said, 'I just call them a mob of bastards'—very, very odd. They thought they were going to lose money, but we said all along that no board would lose any money as far as we were concerned. If it couldn't be established with an extra grant from the (inaudible) and so we don't know what's going to happen about that.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, so that it's still—

ELWYN LYNN: But that initiative has taken a tremendous amount of our time. Also the director, Leon Paroissien, has been very much concerned with making things smooth for the bringing of the Chinese exhibition.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: He went to China twice and he's been to Russia twice. He's been to France, Paris once. We sent Virginia Spate over just the other day for the AGDC Centre. But these things absorb a great deal of time.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, of course.

ELWYN LYNN: The Visual Arts Board's been in a position where we've been seconding our major figure to another body. I don't know whether in the long run this can be done, but it's been done. So that we've had a very active part in the

Chinese thing, the El Dorado thing and in the Sydney Biennale and so on. So we get concerned with these side things in a way for which the Visual Arts Board's not responsible. Now they're making sure we're not responsible to the money situation. I think those things are important and I think that it's important for people like the Museum of Modern Art to know there is one particular body-and this was initiated by John Bailey and his board–there's a body in Australia that's quite responsible for these things. Whereas they mightn't think the Australia Council is, they know the Visual Arts Board is. The Visual Arts Board has become a point of reference, especially for people overseas trying to contact us. I think the overseas liaison with visiting artists and so on has grown. We support the new scheme of artists going to schools, practising artists going to schools for a short time, and also the visiting artist thing, the visiting lecturer. With the efflorescence of the CAE's we've supported this more and more. I think that's important too. I would say that, looking at it, I'm a bit stunned at times at the variety of activities that the Visual Arts Board gets into compared, say, with the Music Board or the Theatre Board which are mainly suppliers of moneys to approve companies as it were. Actually, some of their money is already approved before they get it, whereas all the Visual Arts Board money is still our money. We can take it away from the AGDC if we want to. Not that we do want to, but we're not committed by the one line vote in the budget in Canberra beforehand.

JAMES GLEESON: I see. Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: So I think this flexibility is a good thing. There are some people who have doubts. I read a woman the other day in the *Australian* saying that she saw no point–this is a woman looking after Australian ballet–no point in giving somebody some paint and canvas so they can sit in a room and just do nothing. Well, you know. I mean, our real problem is to try to detect the dedicated artist who will paint probably even if we don't give him a grant.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: We've got to keep our eyes open for the person who's something of a free loader. Still you get a mixture, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: You'll get a guy who's a very creative person and he is also a bit of a freeloader. The art history books are full of them. Gauguins and so on, you know.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: So that I think that's—

JAMES GLEESON: One of the problems.

ELWYN LYNN: One of the problems of choosing these people. I also think that when there was plenty of affluence around, a little bit of oil greased a lot of wheels.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: But now it's not quite like that. I think we have to look more carefully, very carefully, where the grants go and give bigger money perhaps to certain individuals instead of trying to spread it. But you still might spread it fairly thin in Western Australia, fairly thin in Western Australia, fairly thin in Tasmania, to get them moving and alive.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: But in Sydney and Melbourne, you know, I think that you just simply go for important gold, one or two people. If there was more money the policies would be different. And then what we've done also, which I think is a good idea–it's mainly Katrina Rumley's thing–is send out these regional shows. The present one touring of course is the Hinton Collection.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: We've also had works on paper and works in sort of context. The works on paper one and the works in context will be shown in the Australian Embassy in Paris. I hope they like it. These are done in places where the AGDC doesn't touch, you see.

JAMES GLEESON: I see, yes.

ELWYN LYNN: Because they go to members only, as it were.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes, yes, as a supplementary—

ELWYN LYNN: It's a supplementary thing, and we feel there's a lacking, although they're not supposed to deal with that because that's not their area. So this is what we'll do. We sent one to Tasmania and we've sent one, I think, to Queensland and I think these are good ideas, though they may be costing a bit of money.

JAMES GLEESON: Worthwhile.

ELWYN LYNN: Well, you know, I mean, you throw your bread upon the waters, it may come back, it may sink a soggy mass to the bottom. But I think that one is buoyed up in these things by a certain idealism that somewhere out there somebody's life has changed by just seeing something, you know, a little different.

JAMES GLEESON: Yes.

ELWYN LYNN: That's the hope, and I think this is what culture is built on, this kind of thing. Because you never know your audience, you're creating an audience as you go.

JAMES GLEESON: You're reaching out blindly.

ELWYN LYNN: Blindly.

JAMES GLEESON: In the hope that you're going to touch somebody.

ELWYN LYNN: Exactly. If you can arouse a dedicated enthusiasm in a few people, that's enough.

JAMES GLEESON: It will.

ELWYN LYNN: This is the way society works all the time. Dedicated enthusiasm of a few people, whether they're working on the lathe or whether they're working in the newspaper office. I think so.

JAMES GLEESON: Well Jack, I think that about does it. Thank you very much for a very (inaudible).

ELWYN LYNN: Pleasure, pleasure.