

BALDESSIN/WHITELEY PARALLEL VISIONS

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Baldessin/Whiteley: Parallel Visions

George Baldessin and Brett Whiteley were both born in 1939 and were to have a profound impact on Australian art.

In the 1960s and 1970s, they experienced meteoric success in their respective cities of Melbourne and Sydney. They were figurative, expressionist, attracted to popular culture, avant-garde art and existentialist ideas, and explored themes of sexuality and the urban environment. They were innovative in their use of medium, brilliantly provocative in their artistic language and created art that epitomised their epoch. Both died tragically young: Baldessin in 1978, and Whiteley in 1992.

For the first time, the two artists are brought together in this expansive exhibition featuring some of their most iconic works, as well as others that have never been exhibited before. Despite differences in Baldessin's and Whiteley's artistic temperaments, chosen materials and stylistic strategies, their works betray many striking parallels and synergies.

Working in a rapidly changing world in the aftermath of the Second World War, Baldessin and Whiteley made art that not only examined what it meant to be human in an urban environment at a time of tension, but that also celebrated the human spirit. Today their work appears remarkably fresh, vibrant and contemporary.

George Baldessin

George Baldessin was born on Friday, 19 May 1939 in the small city of San Biagio di Callalta, Italy. His mother, Carmella, was a naturalised Australian, and travelled to Melbourne shortly after her son's birth. Before her husband and baby could follow, war broke out and the artist's father, Luigi, was conscripted. The family was not reunited until 1949 in Melbourne. Baldessin became a naturalised Australian in 1954.

Drawn to art from an early age, Baldessin enrolled in 1958 at the art school at Melbourne Technical College (now RMIT University), where he proved a brilliant student. On graduating in 1961, he studied in London at the Chelsea School of Art, and subsequently in Milan at the Brera Academy, where he worked under the celebrated sculptors Marino Marini and Alik Cavaliere. Throughout his studies, Baldessin supported himself by working as a waiter. In 1971, he married Tess Edwards, and the couple would have two children.

A spectacular career was cut short when Baldessin died in a single-vehicle car accident in 1978.

Brett Whiteley

Brett Whiteley was born on Good Friday, 7 April 1939, in Rose Bay, Sydney. His father, Clem Whiteley, came from Bradford in Yorkshire, England, and was drawn to the American film industry. His mother, Beryl Martin, was a receptionist who shared her husband's passion for Hollywood and the world of fashion and glamour.

Whiteley's education was divided between a boarding school in Bathurst, in rural New South Wales, which he hated, and Sydney, which he tolerated. With the end of his parents' marriage, Whiteley left school and found employment at the Lintas Advertising Agency, where he met a number of other emerging artists who became lifelong friends.

In 1960 Whiteley won the Italian Government Travelling Art Scholarship, which took him to Rome at the age of twenty. He arrived in London as a twenty-one-year-old with his partner from Sydney, Wendy Julius, and was an immediate success. Whiteley was included in key exhibitions, had work acquired by the Tate Gallery, and was lionised by parts of the English art world.

Whiteley became one of Australia's highest profile artists before he died from a drug overdose in 1992.

George Baldessin's pears

There is a tradition in Italian metaphysical art where artists, such as Giorgio de Chirico and Alik Cavaliere, deployed giant fruit as an allegory of human existence – as both full of life and existing as pure matter. Giant pears also appear frequently in Baldessin's etchings and sculptures from the 1960s through to his final works in the late 1970s.

Some of the earliest pears in Baldessin's art suggest physical desire and the human form. In subsequent pieces, pears grow increasingly abstracted and emblematic, and in some of Baldessin's installations are like the disciples gathered at the Last Supper, or at one of the tables depicted in Baldessin's *Banquet for No Eating* series. They are anthropomorphic fruit with emotions, and form relationships with people. Whereas Shakespeare exclaims, 'O, Romeo ... thou a Poperin Pear', and Erik Satie composed *Three pieces in the form of a pear*, Baldessin created numerous compositions playing with pear-shaped bodies and on life events that turn 'pear-shaped'.

On an autobiographical level, Baldessin spent many years working as a waiter, where he observed that spiced pears in wine were a sign of culinary sophistication and a symbol of high living.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Pears (silver version)

1970

etching and aquatint, edition of 25

Private collection, Melbourne

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Pears (yellow version)

1972

colour etching and aquatint over colour stencil, edition of
25

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.455

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Pear

1971–72, cast 1972

bronze, unique state, foundry proof

Collection of Sylvia and Tom Lowenstein

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Pear

1971–72, cast 2017
bronze, ed. D5/7

McClelland Sculpture Park + Gallery, Langwarrin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Pears

1971–72, cast 2018

bronze, ed. C3/5 I, C3/5 II, C3/5 III

The Estate of George Baldessin, Courtesy of Australian Galleries, Melbourne

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Evening coming in on Sydney Harbour

1975

oil on cotton on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Presented by Mrs Adrian Gibson as the winner of
the 1975 Sir William Angliss Memorial Art Prize, 1976

A8-1976

Whiteley wrote: 'A painting is a record of extremely intensified moments of life ... where the emotional forces seem to be propelling one to a dangerous limit, where reason + explanations become too feeble, too speeded to matter. What amazes me is that something usually so plastically calm, so attractive can come out of such writhing – inner turmoil ... past-in-the-present ... twitching and panic guts revolving: painting is so intertwined with fear. Fear of what? Probably simply of living'.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Personage with striped dress II

1968

etching, aquatint, drypoint, fowl-bite and plate-tone on
paper on cardboard

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

The Joseph Brown Collection. Presented through
the NGV Foundation by Dr Joseph Brown AO OBE,
Honorary Life Benefactor, 2004

2004.254

Japanese artist Kitagawa Utamaro's half-length coloured woodblock prints of courtesans may have been one source for Baldessin's series of etchings of half-length figures in striped dresses. Another suggested source is Paul Klee's *Actor's mask*, 1924, with its oval-shaped head bisected by the nose in profile – an image well-known at RMIT where Baldessin taught. The stripes on the dress are formed with contrasted bands of aquatint.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Personage with striped dress I

1968

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Figure in enclosure

1964

plaster, bronze patination

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria
by Mr Joseph Brown OBE, Fellow, 1980

AC73-1980

Baldessin's early sculptures share something of the existentialist atmosphere of his etchings of this period. *Figure in enclosure* was exhibited at the Mildura Sculpture Triennial in 1964. Working on a large scale and consciously within the humanist expressionist figurative tradition of sculpture, Baldessin's figure speaks of entrapment and a struggle to establish an identity. In his review of the exhibition, Melbourne-based art critic Alan McCulloch observed that Baldessin's work 'explodes with more energy than is evident in most abstract works'.

George Baldessin and the printmaking revival of the 1960s

Baldessin's early works include modest-scale etchings – figurative, moody black-and-white prints – touching on themes of distress and anguish. Images are frequently shown emerging out of pools of darkness, and the forms are dislocated, non-literal and somewhat menacing.

In 1962, Baldessin travelled to Madrid to examine works by Goya in the Museo del Prado. Another key early influence was cinema, especially Ingmar Bergman's *Sawdust and Tinsel* (1953), which deals with the tragedy of an ageing circus ringmaster who visits his estranged wife while his mistress, to spite him, has an affair with an actor. It is a dark Swedish tragicomedy that became a classic of existentialist cinema.

Baldessin's work is edgy, the figures bulbous, dislocated into planes, biomorphic and generally lacking anatomical coherence. When these etchings and his early sculptures were exhibited in Sydney in 1965, the art critic and artist Elwyn Lynn observed, 'George Baldessin's first Sydney exhibition ... is an extraordinary event, equalled, among the young, only by the first full view of Brett Whiteley. The risks he takes and enjoys spring from Melbourne's imaginative realism and irrational fantasy'.

Top to bottom, left to right

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

City monument (The urinators)

1966

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

The Italian poet Dante once exclaimed, 'O empty glory of human powers! How short the time its green endures at its peak'. With this work, Baldessin commented similarly on the transience of fame. In an attempt to achieve immortality, authorities erect a monument over which people now urinate.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Performer

1964

etching, aquatint and burnishing, ed. 8/10

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.301

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Figure in interior

1964

etching and aquatint, second state

The Estate of George Baldessin

Baldessin studied Goya's extensive series of etchings *The Disasters of War*, 1810–20, as well as the *Hiroshima Panels* by Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi, which toured Australia in the 1950s, to arrive at his bulbous biomorphic figures. He observed: 'Not only am I interested in things that are derived from the human body, but a particular aspect of the human body – that is distorted human bodies, I'm not for these ... so-called attractive reproductions of the human body. I want my figures to have a kind of inner impetus'.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Stars and sawdust III

1963

etching and aquatint, artist's proof

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.291

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Performers with audience

1965

etching and aquatint, ed. 1/25

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.349

Baldessin's performers became interchangeable with 'personages', which implied not only a sense of detachment but also of acting on a stage. Parallels have been seen between these works and those of Edvard Munch and James Ensor and the world of masks, processions and urban rituals. These performers appear like victims in front of a hostile audience.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Stars and sawdust I

1963

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

Baldessin's early etchings drew heavily on imagery from the films of Ingmar Bergman, especially *Sawdust and Tinsel* (1953), and their existential explorations of mortality, identity and loneliness. While studying in Melbourne, Baldessin met artist Fred Williams, who was editioning his London Music Hall etchings. The choice of performers as subject matter, the broken nervous line and the use of a sea of aquatint to silhouette the white of the figures shows Williams's influence.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

The tunnel

1966

etching and aquatint, 2nd state

The Estate of George Baldessin

This major elongated etching presents a passing parade of performers increasingly assembled like phantoms engaged in some enigmatic ritual. Familiarity with the art of Goya, Edvard Munch and James Ensor enriched Baldessin's repertoire of formal devices, such as disembodied figures. In this work, many of the figures encountered individually in earlier images have been brought together and caught within this tunnel.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Enclosure

1964

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Performers with bicycles

1964

etching and aquatint, ed. 8/10

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.303

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Acrobat (performer)

1964

etching and aquatint

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.306

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Aged dancer

1965

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Head

1965

etching and aquatint, edition of 10

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1966

NGA 66.76

Head is an important etching from the mid 1960s in which sexuality is ambivalent and identities merge. The right side of the face is apparently male with short-cropped hair, while the left is female with long feminine hair. The hand is accentuated and seems to be grooming the side of the head.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Stars and sawdust II

1963

etching and aquatint, edition of 10

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.290

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Ultimate death of E.M.

1964

etching and aquatint

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1965

1541-5

Baldessin's cast of characters that emerged in the 1960s had a definite identity but lacked a name. He noted, 'A name just didn't do and I was thinking of initials. I was looking at a car number plate ... for initials, until finally rereading Joyce, his *Ulysses*, I found P.H.B which was one of his personalities, and I liked that and I used it'. The 'E.M.' in this work plays with the idea that inscriptions are reversed in printingmaking, so this refers to 'ME' – the artist himself.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Family, friend and one other

1964

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Dancers

1963

etching and aquatint

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Bequest of Mrs Carmen Baldessin, 1991

P169-1991

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Dancer

1966

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Personage and monument

1964

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Recurring day in the life of MM

1965

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Rope walker

1964

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Personage in enclosure II

1965

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

In Baldessin's series of etchings in the *Personage in Enclosure* series, a tension gradually develops between the organic, biomorphic humanoid forms and the surrounding geometric spaces that encroach on the figures. Subsequently, many of the figures lose their freedom and autonomy as they become captives of their surrounding urban spaces.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Figures in enclosure (MM and friend)

1965

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Recurring landscape

1965

etching

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Acrobat

1964

etching and aquatint, edition of 10

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.304

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Performers

1974

colour etching and aquatint, ed. 15/15

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.470

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Acrobats

1964

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Procession

1966

etching and aquatint, edition of 10

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.389

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Figure in interior no. 2

1964

etching and aquatint, edition of 10

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.323

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Personage and emblems

1972

etching, aquatint and colour stencil

Private collection, Melbourne

A number of Baldessin's etchings of the early 1970s are distinguished by their scale, compositional boldness and colour. The personage is trapped within an interior space and weighed down by their emblems. To achieve scale in this nearly square print, Baldessin printed from two plates on two sheets of paper that are united into a single composition.

Brett Whiteley's early abstract paintings

Whiteley's early paintings made in Europe drew on the heritage of Abstract Expressionism that was in vogue in England and France. Artists who attracted his gaze included the Armenian-American painter Arshile Gorky, Canadian-American Philip Guston and the English painter William Scott, all of whom, for the young Australian, had echoes of painters John Passmore, Russell Drysdale and Lloyd Rees – his 'little gods' from Sydney.

Whiteley observed: 'I could see what abstraction was. It was the culmination of something in which one had served a tremendous apprenticeship and had gone through a terrific amount of experimentation. It was also a very slow process of whittling at which one arrived ... at a visual equation in which everything else had been stripped away and reduced. What you were left with was this peculiar essence or summary, this hieroglyph of everything you had tried to achieve'.

In London, Whiteley's paintings enjoyed spectacular success, with excellent sales, critical acclaim and recognition from the English art establishment. However, by the age of twenty-three, he felt he could no longer commit himself to abstraction and would have to engage more fully with life, in all its multifaceted figuration and sensuous beauty.

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Untitled painting

1962

oil, tempera and collage on composition board

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
Gift of the Contemporary Art Society, London 1965

0.2064

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Summer at Sigean

1962–63

synthetic polymer paint, oil, tempera, charcoal, pencil on hessian and cotton gauze on composition board

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.56.A-C

Brett and Wendy Whiteley were married in London in 1962 and spent their honeymoon living in an old farmhouse in the town of Sigean in the South of France, close to the Spanish border. This large triptych is the major painting of this period, commenced in Sigean and completed in London. Whiteley was not only playing with the dimension of time and exploring the changing seasons through a variety of apricot yellows, earthy umbers, ochres and pinks, but was also questioning abstraction. Regardless of whether one wishes to interpret the shapes as landscape elements or anatomical manifestations, the pull is towards representational forms.

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Preparatory drawing for Summer at Sigean

1962

charcoal and pen and ink

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Gift of Brett Whiteley, 1979

NGA 79.1685

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Remembering Lao Tse (Shaving off a second)

1967

pencil, pen and ink

Art Gallery of Ballarat
Gift of Jerry Van Beek, 1968

1968.30

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

July painting

c. 1959

oil on canvas on composition board

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Gift of the Rudy Komon Memorial Fund 1985

7.1985

This is one of four paintings that Whiteley exhibited at the Italian Government Travelling Art Scholarship exhibition hosted by the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. He was awarded the scholarship and his career was launched on his arrival in Europe. The judge of the scholarship exhibition, Russell Drysdale, found that Whiteley's paintings showed 'real strength and perception, the work of a real painter'.

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Sofala

1958

oil on canvas on composition board

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Purchased by the New South Wales State

Government 1994, transferred to the Gallery 1998

351.1998

Sofala and Hill End were old goldmining towns where, in the 1940s, Russell Drysdale, Donald Friend, Jean Bellette and others established an artists' colony. Whiteley visited Sofala in the 1950s on painting excursions with friends. In this work, he drew on the palette and schematic simplification of Drysdale's *Sofala*, 1947, but has flattened the picture plane to rearrange the miners' cottages, water tanks, arched bridge, trees, old mining trenches and picket fence against a red-earth background with a high, truncated horizon line.

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Untitled warm painting

1961

tempera, oil and collage on composition board

TarraWarra Museum of Art Collection, Victoria
Gift of Eva Besen and Marc Besen AO 2003

2003.012

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Untitled warm painting I

1960

synthetic polymer medium, charcoal, pencil and string on composition board

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

NGA 63.20

Whiteley wrote in his 1960–61 notebook: 'I want to express how I feel about God / how I feel about my / sister how I feel about / colour. How / I feel about love, time / everything / I want to express / what I know about / them and even what / I don't ... if everything is right [the] rest rapture / complete happiness / is my domain'.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Performer

1972

bronze

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Trapeze

1965

cast bronze, synthetic polymer paint, edition of 4

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Gift of the George Baldessin Foundation 1997

NGA 97.610

In 1965, Baldessin spoke of a new aesthetic emerging in his art: 'People say that my work is ugly, it appears to them bulbous and ugly. I can't really understand this. I think beauty has a certain degree of order and one of the things about my work is that they're very ordered ... when they become accustomed to it, they might find that these things aren't really ugly, they're rather attractive: at least droll, if not attractive'.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Studies for sculptures

1964–65

pen and ink

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1971

P99-1971

Baldessin once wrote, 'I never draw or make drawings or studies for sculpture. Usually the interest is derived when I actually start manipulating – I rarely have a definite idea of what I am going to do. I think of perhaps a figure form in some odd angle and from here I start, and then the sculpture more or less arrives'. These pen-and-ink studies are fanciful explorations of possible figures projecting into three-dimensional space.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Study for sculpture

1964–65

pen and ink

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased 1971

P106-1971

Brett Whiteley's *Regent's Park Zoo* screenprints

Although Whiteley was primarily a painter, he also created a considerable body of original prints and sculptures.

In London, he was introduced to master screenprinter Chris Prater at Kelpra Studios. Together they produced the *Regent's Park Zoo* folio in 1965, published by Marlborough Fine Art. It consists of six colour screenprints with a title page rendered in the then pioneering technique of photo-stencilling that permitted a crisp juxtaposition of complex and varied textures, images and surfaces.

Whiteley observed: 'This was the first time I took printmaking + especially silk screen really seriously. It was more than just a way of breeding gouaches, it was the first time I conceived in series, where each print would confirm or contradict the image before it ... The last screen to be used each time in this series was always aimed at a thin nervous black line that would bring a third space or irony to the subject'.

The prints are a brilliant exploration of the relationship between human and animal emotions, where Whiteley's virtuosity as a draughtsperson combined with humour and inventive skill to produce startling images that are simultaneously entertaining, confronting and seductively beautiful.

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Title page: Regent's Park Zoo series

1965

colour screenprint

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Purchased 1965

DA11.1966

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Swinging Monkey 1

from *Regent's Park Zoo* series

1965

colour screenprint

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Purchased 1965

DA5.1966

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Swinging monkey 2

from the *Regent's Park Zoo* series

1965

colour screenprint, ed. 9/70

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, 1966

1625-5

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Swinging monkey 3

from the *Regent's Park Zoo* series

1965

colour screenprint, ed. 9/70

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, 1966

1626-5

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Drawing about drawing

from the *Regent's Park Zoo* series

1965

colour screenprint

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Purchased 1965

DA8.1966

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Giraffe

from the *Regent's Park Zoo* series

1965

colour screenprint

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Purchased 1965

DA9.1966

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Hyena

from the *Regent's Park Zoo* series

1965

screenprint printed in black and yellow ink

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

Purchased 1965

DA10.1966

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Sacred baboon

1975

brush and ink, wood stain, watercolour, gouache and cut printed colour illustration on cardboard

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1978

A23-1978

‘One of the hardest things is to discipline oneself to keep looking until one sees to a point of almost insistent madness, to concentrate on one vision until it discloses its third and fourth veil, to keep seeing past what you have just seen requires feeling and ambition, the more open, the more unexpected and extraordinary the intervention – that’s surrealism, but eventually a natural, uncomplicated glimpse appears and that’s what one is after.’

BRETT WHITELEY, 1976

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

White sacred baboon

1965

encaustic on wood

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Presented through the NGV Foundation by Dr Joseph

Brown AO OBE, Honorary Life Benefactor, 2004

2004.246

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Giraffe No 1

1965

brass, mangrove wood, marble, bronze and oil

Whiteley Estate, Sydney

Whiteley exhibited his *Christie* series together with zoo paintings, sculptures and graphics at Marlborough Gallery in October 1965, where the conceptual link between caged and escaped animals from the zoo, and the caged victims and killer on the loose was apparent. This tall giraffe, with its unorthodox selection of materials, and the *White sacred baboon*, 1965, also in this exhibition, were included in the Marlborough Gallery exhibition.

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Brolga (Dance)

1979

wood, encaustic, marble

Private collection, Melbourne

The existential urban vision

Both Baldessin and Whiteley were affected by the existentialist atmosphere prevailing in the 1960s and 1970s, which found expression in the songs of Bob Dylan and the films of Ingmar Bergman, Stanley Kubrick and Andrei Tarkovsky.

Francis Bacon, the towering figurative artist who dominated the European art scene, was a major influence on both Baldessin and Whiteley and was known personally to both. At this time the world appeared out of joint, and art, to some extent, set out to make sense of it.

Baldessin's circus performers burst onto the scene in 1963–64 and rapidly developed into biomorphic figures and figures captured in enclosures, presented on parade or witnessing one of Baldessin's *Banquets for No Eating*. The artist peered at the world through windows into industrial wastelands, smokestacks and through clouds of smoke. Figures appeared captured within their interiors, at times mutilated and cantilevered across the picture plane, their anatomy distorted and faces becoming mask-like and tortured. Allegories and enigmas populate this new reality featuring giant pears, flags and emblems.

Whiteley depicted caged animals and serial killers on the loose. The savage beauty of his work combined sensuous line and violent colours and spoke of altered states and a divided self.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Personage and blind

1973

etching and aquatint printed in black and blue ink

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.456

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Performer and bouquet

1969

aluminium

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
A.R. Ragless Bequest Fund 1970

7010S4

In the 1960s, aluminium emerged as a modern, lightweight, flexible sculptural medium, whose shiny surface tapped into the Pop Art aesthetics of the day and attracted both Baldessin and Whiteley. The striped dress realised in aquatint in the etchings on this life-size aluminium female performer is translated into bands of colour, while the head is transformed into a bouquet of flowers. It is a beguiling and ambiguous sculpture that was acquired by the Art Gallery of South Australia shortly after it was exhibited in Sydney.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Three-sided personage

1974

enamel paint on aluminium

The Estate of George Baldessin

As in a number of his etchings, in this life-size aluminium sculpture, Baldessin combines two profile views of the same figure, suggesting not only a movement in space but also a passage of time. The figure has a beguiling presence: we see remnants of the striped costume, as well as hair that seems to be covering the body and from which emerges a delicate hand.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

The table

1974

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Bedfellows

1974

etching and aquatint, artist's proof

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Ian and Sonya Rutherford, 2007

2007.342

Baldessin was at the centre of many artistic developments in Melbourne across the full spectrum of the arts.

This etching was a design for a poster for *Bedfellows: A Triangular Comedy* by Barry Oakley, directed by Jack Hibberd, at the Pram Factory in January 1974. Within a startling three-dimensional interior, three figures are ambiguously suspended in space.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Personage, window and factory smoke

1966

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

Baldessin explored the idea that a person's identity can be disguised by their function in life. He noted about his many years of working as a waiter, 'I know how it feels to have my personality pushed into the background so that all I consist of is virtually a hand of service and a few related objects'. This idea grew into the aluminium sculpture exhibited next to this etching.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

The banquet

1971

etching and aquatint and stencil printed in pink ink,
artist's proof

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.447

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Banquet for no eating

1970

colour etching, aquatint and stencil, edition of 25

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Gift of George Baldessin, 1975

NGA 75.508

Baldessin's studio in the Winfield building in Melbourne became something of a hub, where artists from around Australia would gather for generous banquets accompanied by copious amounts of wine. John Olsen recalls cooking there on his visits to Melbourne. The studio was also characterised by an extreme work ethic, where fourteen-hour days were a regular occurrence. On this corrugated table lies a solitary pear. The arrangement may recall Baldessin's years of working as a waiter at the upmarket Menzies Hotel, where for the hotel waiters, food was not for eating, but for serving to clients.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Banquet for no eating

1971

etching and aquatint and colour stencil

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Banquet for no eating no. 2

1971

etching, aquatint and colour stencil, artist's proof

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1972

P5-1972

'The chairs', Baldessin once exclaimed, 'do not invite sitting on. They are most uncomfortable and oversized. One has to get away from reality'. In this banquet, the guest seems to grow out of one of one of the chairs, not sit on it, and the table is laid with what in some other prints are called 'fetishes'. In subsequent works these objects are morphed into emblems. Baldessin observed, if 'you subtract the people or the food, the consequence is a banquet for no eating'.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Small banquet

1971–72

cast aluminium and resin

Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane
Purchased 1984

1984.144

The sculptural banquet table with its giant pear and enigmatic fetishes to some extent has been pre-empted in the preceding *Banquet for no eating* etchings. Neither people nor food is necessary in this banquet, as style and presentation become the substance and meaning of the work. The banquet table acts as a microcosm of the artist, and his studio is expressed in a Pop Art idiom.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Banquet

1976

bronze

The Estate of George Baldessin

In the 1970s, Baldessin produced a number of small-scale bronzes which act as a visual summary of many of his pictorial concerns. *Banquet* presents what is ostensibly a woman's torso and some pears on an altar-like table. Closer examination reveals that the torso is in the process of morphing into a pear, while the head, as in the earlier *Performer and bouquet* in this exhibition, has been converted into a bouquet of flowers.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

The cage (figure in enclosure)

1966

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Bather

1964

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

Baldessin introduced the formal device of a striped costume to further break up the space of his images, and to lend complexity and ambiguity to the depicted forms. The thighs of the bather are bulbous, the hands are tiny and functionless, the head is cropped and no longer signifies identity. Baldessin progressively abandoned the use of aquatint as a solid block of tone; instead, it designated areas of contrasted textures.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Recurring day in the life of MM II

1966

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Performance (Variation 2)

1971

etching, aquatint and colour stencil

Private collection, Melbourne

By the 1970s, prints were no longer considered a minor art form secondary to painting or sculpture, but occupied centrestage in the art world. *Performance (Variation 2)* is a large and brilliant work conceived in two halves, like two cubes shown in three-dimensional perspective: on the left, the performing arched figure; on the right, a mysterious altar with sacrificial smoke emerging from a burning flagpole.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Disillusionment of the third entrance

1972

colour etching and aquatint on 2 sheets

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1973

P10-1973

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Monument to the third architecture

1971

aluminium

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Presented by Comalco Ltd, Melbourne, 1980

AC62-1980

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Doors

1966

colour etching, ed. 1/5

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.402

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Emblems

1973

etching and aquatint, artist's proof

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.458

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Totem I (black – the get laid totem)

1978–88

fibreglass and wood

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Purchased by the New South Wales State
Government 1994, transferred to the Gallery 1998

349.1998.a-c

Sculpture had always been a feature of Whiteley's work, but in the 1970s and 1980s began appearing in greater variety and in considerable numbers. Animals, birds and bird nests were some of his most memorable sculptural creations. In these, he demonstrated an ability to transform a form suggested in his materials into a figurative reading full of excitement and surprise. Birds were among his favourite sculptural manifestations; in many instances, these works were self-referential and open to various autobiographical interpretations.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

First view of the city

1967

charcoal, pastel and pen and ink over pencil on paper on
synthetic polymer paint and metallic paint on composition
board

Collection of the Reverend Ian Brown, Melbourne

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Silver glance recurring

1968

aluminium

Private collection, Melbourne

Baldessin first experimented with printing on aluminium foil in 1967, playing with the idea of the metal etching plate printing onto a metallic surface. The gaze of the viewer is reflected in the mirror-like surface of the print so that you are absorbed into the composition. The silver foil laminate was cut to plate size and carefully positioned on the sheet of paper, while the plate had to be meticulously inked so as to leave a crisp impression on the non-absorbent silver surface without smudging.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

The mirror

1967

etching and aquatint, colour stencil

The Estate of George Baldessin

This etching, sometimes simply titled *Mirror*, is one of a series of Baldessin's reflected images from the mid 1960s which blur the boundary between identities, genders and realities. The artist introduced a colour stencil around the mirror border as a visual and conceptual device to extract the image from the space of the viewer. One possible interpretation of the image is of a woman putting on make-up.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

The bather I

1973, printed 1978

colour lithograph, edition of 300

printed by John Robinson, Druckma Press, Melbourne

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1984

NGA 84.1306

This is a very unusual print in Baldessin's oeuvre. Whereas most of his prints are etchings, frequently made with aquatint and colour stencil, this one is a colour lithograph. Usually Baldessin printed very small editions of ten or twenty-five prints; this one is in an edition of 300. Baldessin printed most of his etchings himself, with his assistants, but this was printed by John Robinson. In 1976 Baldessin, Robinson and Les Kossatz set up Druckma Press to edition their own work and work for other artists. The press closed in 1983.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Personage and factory smoke

1974

etching, aquatint and stencil printed in black and brown
ink, edition of 25

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Gift of William Peter Kerr and Edwin James Schefferle, 2015

2015.426

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Personage, window and factory smoke

1966

enamel paint on aluminium

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Performers

1966

black crayon, watercolour and gouache

The Estate of George Baldessin

In Baldessin's work, performers occupy a stage-like space with a degree of detachment. They act in an aloof and uninvolved manner, their true feelings disguised and concealed from their audience. This rare polychrome drawing remained in Baldessin's studio after his death and has never been exhibited before.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Window and factory smoke

1967

etching, aquatint and colour stencil

The Estate of George Baldessin

Increasingly in Baldessin's work, the window becomes a striking compositional element that frames both the inside and outside worlds and brings together a multiplicity of views. Melbourne artist John Brack had long employed reflections in shop windows to merge different spaces. Baldessin builds on this pictorial heritage to indicate urban smokestacks as a form of pollution and as echoes of the horrors of the Second World War. These are elements that break down the building blocks of life and society.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Personage and window

1967

gouache, brush and pen and coloured inks

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1971

P100-1971

This drawing combines many of Baldessin's artistic concerns of the 1960s. The organic figure appears trapped within a geometric framework. The extravagant hair and the delicate hand may be reminiscent of Japanese artist Kitagawa Utamaro's self-grooming figures, yet the expressive composition and perspective may point to the work of Japanese artists, including Shikō Munakata. It is a hypnotic, ambiguous and powerful image.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Red and black

1966

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Red and black

1966

etching, aquatint and colour stencil

The Estate of George Baldessin

Baldessin's interest in Japanese printmaking, especially the work of Shikō Munakata and Kitagawa Utamaro, was fostered by his mentor at RMIT Tate Adams, in whose Crossley Gallery he was exhibiting. In 1966, Baldessin visited Japan on the Alcorso-Sekers Travelling Scholarship Award for Sculpture and sought out a number of Japanese printmakers. In *Red and black*, Baldessin is experimenting with fragmented spaces reminiscent of screens in Japanese domestic architecture. He printed this etching in different colour variations.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Personage, window and factory smoke II

1967

colour etching and aquatint, edition of 25

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.428

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Assemblage of past images

1973

etching and aquatint over colour stencil, edition of 25

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.466

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Night personages

1970

colour etching, aquatint and stencil, edition of 25

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.445

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Park under sunlight

1976

oil on canvas

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria
by Mrs Margaret Stewart, Founder Benefactor, 1985

AC13-1985

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Mother and child

1977

etching, aquatint and plate-tone printed in brown ink, ed.
44/60

printed by Max Miller, Max Miller Studio, published by Port
Jackson Press, Sydney

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1977

NGA 77.257

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Back view

1976

etching, ed. 29/60

printed by Max Miller, Max Miller Studio, published by Port Jackson Press, Sydney

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Gift of Brett Whiteley 1976

NGA 76.967

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Profile portrait of Arthur Boyd

1976

etching, printer's proof

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria
by the Leon and Sandra Velik Endowment for
Contemporary Drawings, Fellow, 1993

P182-1992

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Performers

1968

etching and aquatint printed in purple and black ink,
edition of 25

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.432

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Performer

1968

etching and aquatint, artist's proof

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Gift of George Baldessin, 1975

NGA 75.502

In 1968, Baldessin established a studio in the Winfield building, in central Melbourne. With access to his own press, his prints grew in scale, boldness, colour and technical sophistication. The contorted figure in *Performer* combines a powerful sexuality with theatrics of presentation. The use of blocks of strong colour, ambiguous perspective and the confrontational frontal stare make this a remarkably effective image.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Performers and tinsel

1966

colour etching and aquatint, edition of 10

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.412

Three performers dangle awkwardly on stage in different states of dress and undress. Strips of sparkling tinsel float down from above, seemingly as immaterial as the figures performing on stage. For Baldessin, the performer was, in Shakespeare's words, a 'poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then is heard no more', surviving only in the audience's memory.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Warlords before their own proper monuments

1964

etching and aquatint

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Emblems I

1976

colour etching and aquatint (*à la poupée*)

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Personage

c. 1969

oil wash on gesso on plywood

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 2014

NGA 2014.902

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

The hat

1967

colour etching and aquatint, artist's proof

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1975

NGA 75.416

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Headache

1965–66

oil and tempera and collage of mirror and Bex packets, ink, material, polyvinyl acetate, sand, plaster and linseed oil on composition board

Collection of Robin Gibson, Sydney

After Whiteley's spectacular success in London, he and Wendy returned to Sydney in December 1965. Like Baldessin, Whiteley was attracted to Pop Art, and this ingenious collage is a prime example of that fascination. Australia failed to challenge him, Whiteley observed: 'For six months a going back. Beyond eyes, behind childhood, tumbling and telescoping into days, and old ways – grinning and brimming apricot hot desire on transparency blue days, of honey-legged girls and half-baked mateship warming sand to a haze. And what a haze! So gentle – delicious sunny indifference – the freedom of stupor'.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Two aspects of MM

1977

etching and aquatint, 3rd state

The Estate of George Baldessin

After completing the monumental drawings of the *MM of Rue St Denis* series, Baldessin created this brilliant large-scale etching. In the *MM* series, Baldessin married the identities of the biblical Mary Magdalene, as interpreted in the Middle Ages – the penitent who covered her nakedness with her long red-blond hair – and the prostitute plying her trade on Rue St Denis in Paris. Curiously, in this etching the two identities are separated, and a basic duality of life and death is explored.

Brett Whiteley's *Christie* series

In 1964, at the peak of his early success, Whiteley commenced a series that has served to define him as an artist. It was an act of considerable courage by the twenty-five-year-old to abandon non-figurative art, for which he had received considerable acclaim, and adopt a new subject in the recent crimes of John Christie, a serial murderer.

Christie, an army veteran and former postman, moved to Notting Hill in 1938 and settled with his wife Ethel at 10 Rillington Place, very close to Ladbroke Grove where the Whiteleys first lived in London. Over the course of a decade, Christie is believed to have murdered at least eight women. While he was only ever charged with the murder of his wife, Ethel, he also admitted to killing Muriel Amelia Eady, Beryl Evans, Ruth Fuerst, Hectorina MacLennan, Kathleen Maloney and Rita Nelson.

Whiteley observed: 'I wanted to take something as bad as the human condition could get ... something filthy, repugnant, at the very bottom of the scale ... and try to purge it'.

The story was told and retold in the tabloids, and shocked and fascinated 1950s London. These works can also be interpreted as a meditation on the spectacle and voyeurism present in the media's preoccupation with grotesque acts of violence.

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Christie drawing

1964, reworked 1965

charcoal

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
The Alan Boxer Bequest 2014

NGA 2014.2397

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Christie and Kathleen Maloney

1964–65

oil, wax, charcoal and collage of cloth on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1973

NGA 73.387

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Rita Nelson

1964–65

oil on plywood

Collection of Deague Art Foundation, Melbourne

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

10 Rillington Place

1964

oil and graphite on canvas on plywood, charcoal on paper, gelatin silver photographs, cord, cup, object, wood and glass

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Samuel E. Wills Bequest, 1986

AC2-1986

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

10 Rillington Place W11 (Still from a proposed 16 mm film)

1964–65

colour screenprint, ed. 39/70

printed by Chris Prater at Kelpra Studio, London,

published by Marlborough Fine Art, London

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Purchased 1976

NGA 76.966

In this work, printed by Chris Prater at Kelpra Studio in London, Whiteley creates a hauntingly effective image of the serial killer standing in his kitchen – the same scene presented as an installation in Madame Tussauds wax museum in London. The mask attached to the gas tube, complete with its bulldog clip, hovers over the chair, which awaits its next victim. The use of perforated film-strip edges gives the screenprint a dramatic presence and the idea of ‘actuality footage’ (a term used for raw footage in early documentary films).

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Christie and Hectorina McLennan

1964–65

oil, wax, charcoal with collage of cloth and painted wood, object wrapped in cloth and transparent synthetic polymer resin on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1973

NGA 75.25

If Baldessin found inspiration in the misfits and outsiders of Ingmar Bergman's *Sawdust and Tinsel*, Whiteley found a starting point in the criminally disturbed mind of John Christie. Whiteley drew on the art of Francis Bacon for compositional devices and the painting of masses of flesh, and on American artists Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg for the idea of placing enigmatic objects within the picture space as touchstones of reality.

George Baldessin's *MM of Rue St Denis* series

Baldessin, accompanied by his wife Tess and baby son Gabriel, stayed in Paris for eighteen months, working at the Atelier Lacourière et Frélaut, making etchings and creating a major series of large-scale charcoal and conté drawings, the *MM of Rue St Denis* series.

In Paris, Baldessin started to work on a theme related to the biblical repentant sinner Mary Magdalene, who stood at the foot of Christ's cross. On a visit to Siena, Baldessin encountered late medieval images of her with long flowing red hair, and sometimes wearing a fur. As a penitential sinner, Magdalene was frequently shown in the wilderness with her body covered in hair.

On returning to Paris, Baldessin observed, 'In Paris I used to walk down the Rue Saint-Denis, the prostitutes' street, and as autumn was coming on I noticed that the girls, the Madeleines of Rue Saint-Denis, started wearing a kind of rusty red-coloured fur coat ... They were twentieth-century Mary Magdelenes walking the streets of Les Halles and near the Georges Pompidou Centre ... the Madeleine of my drawings became the personage which wasn't the Rue Saint-Denis prostitutes and wasn't the Mary Magdalene but was both'.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Study for MM of Rue St Denis

1976

charcoal and black chalk

Private collection, Melbourne

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Untitled (Study for MM of Rue St Denis)

1976

charcoal and black chalk

Private collection, Melbourne

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

MM of Rue St Denis

1976

charcoal and black chalk

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased with the assistance of The
Docking Drawing Fund (NGV), 2001

2001.537

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

MM of Rue St Denis (3)

1976

charcoal and black chalk

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

MM of Rue St Denis (4)

1976

charcoal and black chalk

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

MM of Rue St Denis (2)

1976

charcoal and red and black chalk

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

MM of Rue St Denis (5)

1976

charcoal and black chalk

The Estate of George Baldessin

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

MM and chair

1977

etching, aquatint and colour stencil

The Estate of George Baldessin

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

The spray at Bondi

1981

oil on canvas

Private collection, Melbourne

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Woman on a beach looking at an art catalogue

1980

oil on canvas

Private collection, Melbourne

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Interior with time past

1976

oil, charcoal and ink on canvas

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Purchased 1978

NGA 79.795

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

My armchair

1976

oil on canvas

Private collection, Melbourne

Francis Bacon and Henri Matisse were two of Whiteley's significant artistic inspirations. Matisse's famous pronouncement concerning art being 'like a good armchair in which to rest from personal fatigue' was the starting point for many of Whiteley's views of his studio at Lavender Bay in Sydney. He noted, 'I think Matisse set up a way of viewing ... The picture is the promise of the poem'.

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

Lipstick

1981

colour lithograph, fibre-tipped pen, watercolour and collage, printer's proof

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of Fred Genis, 1985

P33-1985

Nudes are present throughout Whiteley's oeuvre and are sometimes more successfully resolved in graphics than in paintings. Made in collaboration with the master printer Fred Genis, Whiteley's colour lithograph combines sensuality of line with humour and spontaneity. The artist observed that 'Calligraphy's poetry simply comes down to being the discrepancy between seeing and feeling'.

George Baldessin's *Occasional images from a city chamber*

In 1975, Baldessin, together with artist Imants Tillers, was invited to represent Australia at the XIII Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil.

Baldessin's contribution was *Occasional images from a city chamber*, 1975, a striking monumental sculptural installation accompanied by twenty-five etchings printed on silver foil. In some ways, this was a summation of Baldessin's art to date, bringing together many of his iconographic and conceptual concerns.

Like Pablo Picasso's *Vollard Suite* made in the 1930s, Baldessin's work combined images of himself as the magician and creator, scenes from his studio, including the resident pigeon, and references to some of the obsessive themes in his oeuvre.

Printed in his new studio in rural St Andrews, the prints were printed on laminate (with a strike rate of one successful print to five rejects) and brought together Baldessin's surreal industrial imagery of giant pears, smokestacks, body parts and the urban wasteland. It was an installation where the artist seemed to occupy centrestage, from where he conducted a grand and surreal existential theatrical event. On entering the space, viewers saw themselves reflected in the polished surfaces of the surrounding imagery.

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Occasional images from a city chamber

1975

etching and aquatint, artist's proof

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased through The Art Foundation of Victoria with the assistance of Miss Flora MacDonald

Anderson and Mrs Ethel Elizabeth Ogilvy Lumsden, Founder Benefactors, 1992 P35.a-y-1992

George Baldessin

Italy 1939 – Australia 1978,
Australia from 1949

Wall mural

1975

aluminium

Deakin University Art Collection, Melbourne
Purchased with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board
of the Australian Council, 1975

1986.23

In 1975 Baldessin completed two monumental aluminium panels. *Occasional screens with seating arrangement*, which was exhibited at the Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil, and this larger and more abstracted wall mural, which was acquired in the year of its creation by Deakin University. Buttressed at either end by large female figures in relief, a remarkable band of emblems and body parts link the two panels. Baldessin observed in 1978, 'Drawing on metal is more like the end result of sculpture than using paper and pen'.

Brett Whiteley's *The American Dream*

The Whiteleys arrived in New York in September 1967 and immediately settled into the penthouse at the fashionable Chelsea Hotel. There they quickly met many famous names in the American art and music scene.

In New York, Whiteley sought to create a single work that would capture the spirit of America, and its essence and dilemma, in the most contemporary language. He wrote: 'I was determined myself to produce a monumental work of art that would summarise the sensation of the impending necessity for America to own up, analyse and straighten out the immense and immediately seeable MADNESS that seemed to run through most facets of American life – of little use of continuing ... This painting is a record of a struggle and my inability to resolve it; it is an admission of failure'.

The American Dream, 1968–69, is a sprawling, 22-metre-long, all-enveloping installation, a kaleidoscopic image that simultaneously brought together all that was good and bad in the United States. It combined the public and the personal with images of Bob Dylan, Vincent van Gogh, the Whiteleys' daughter Arkie, Hitler and the war in Vietnam.

Brett Whiteley

Australia 1939–92, lived in England 1960–67

The American Dream

1968–69

oil, tempera, collage and found objects on plywood

State Art Collection, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
Purchased 1978