

CHAPTER 5 - WAGING WAR ON THE ESTABLISHMENT? ETHEL ANDERSON, MODERN ART AND SYDNEY SOCIETY, 1924-40

Ethel Anderson encountered a milieu of social uncertainty and rapid change on her arrival in Sydney in late 1924. From England she brought fresh artistic interests and ideas, and a propensity to cultural activism, but Sydney's cultural response to the uncertainty presented numerous obstacles to her efforts as a patron of the arts. Conservative nationalism in Sydney during the 1920s alternately took provincial and parochial paths. Seeing themselves in relation to the rest of the western world, culturists of all types adapted nineteenth century British ideals to the city's perceived cultural needs. Writers of the period, welcoming antipodean expatriates into their midst, sought to aid the development of Australian literature and the consolidation of the literary community itself. Middle class male custodial figures, viewing culture in terms of human improvement and civilisation, evoked an Arnoldian idealism. For some, however, that idealism led to disillusionment with and outright rejection of modern European society and its cultural offerings. Even Britain in their eyes had been tarnished with decadence. Thus in 1923 Lionel Lindsay applauded Australia's isolation from 'all the revolutionary manias of a rotted world'.¹ He expressed pride in the selection of Australia art collected to exhibit in London. These displayed the supposedly unperturbed serenity of the nation's artistic output, conveying something of the beauty of the land, and the egalitarian and pioneering spirit of Australian legend. Lionel and Norman Lindsay, along with art critic for *The Sun*, Howard Ashton, and his father, an original Heidelberg artist and influential Sydney art teacher, Julian Ashton, cherished that tradition. Yet they eschewed the radicalism suggested by its birth in the late 1880s and early 1890s when they, as Bohemians, found

¹ Lionel Lindsay, 'Australian Art', in *The Exhibition of Australian Art in London, 1923*, (Sydney: Art in Australia Ltd, 1923), n.p.

their artistic and intellectual feet and the union movement gained momentum. In interwar Australia the landscapes represented a pre-industrial, pre-modern existence and the new movement widely known as modern art was attacked. It has been argued that they hoped to 'quarantine' Australia from the social and cultural diseases they believed had already undermined the great civilisations of Europe.²

The members of the Board of Trustees of the National Art Gallery of New South Wales (as it was then known), as well as the executives of the Royal Art Society and Society of Artists, whose official stance the Lindsays and Ashtons vocalised, formed the frontline of Australian resistance to modernism in art. The entrenched story of Australian art of the interwar period inaccurately perpetuates the concept of a polarised context in which the reactionary establishment contended with artistic progressives.³ Yet as Australian society was in a state of flux with changing attitudes to, among other things, commerce, gender, and intellectual and creative pursuits, numerous subtleties attach to the story. That the Sydney art establishment comprising of the above individuals and institutions failed for many years to offer encouragement or significant patronage to modernist artists is given. Instead, in the absence of institutional support, and in addition

² John F. Williams, *Quarantined Culture: Australian Reactions to Modernism 1913-1939*, (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1995). See Lloyd Rees, *Small Treasures of a Lifetime*, (Sydney: Ure Smith, 1969), pp.93-94 concerning the attachment of art establishment leaders to the landscape tradition, and Ian Burns *National Life and Landscapes: Australian painting 1900-1940*, (Sydney: Bay Books, 1991), and Terry Smith, 'The Divided Meaning of *Shearing the Rams*: Artists and Nationalism, 1888-1891', in A. Bradley and T. Smith (ed.s), *Australian Art and Architecture: Essays Presented to Bernard Smith*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp.99-123. regarding the shifts in meaning attached to pastorales.

³ See various works by Bernard Smith including, 1962, *Australian Painting, 1788-1970*, with three additional chapters on Australian painting since 1970 by Terry Smith, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1991); Geoffrey Dutton, *The Innovators: the Sydney alternatives in the rise of modern art, literature and ideas*, (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1986), for discussion concerning the 1930s; Richard Haese, 1981, *Modern Australian Art*, first published by Penguin as *Rebels and Precursors*, (New York: Alpine Fine Arts Collection, 1982), and Rees, *Small Treasures*, pp.93-94 concerning reactions to modern art. See also Christine Dixon 'Arguing the Modern: the Australian Academy of Art versus the Contemporary Art Society', *Art Network*, (Winter-Spring 1986), pp. 56-7 for appraisal of the victor mentality of historiography concerning modern art. For a discussion on the origins of the trustee's artistic taste, see Andrew Montana, *The Art Movement in Australia: Design, Taste and Society 1875-1900*, (Melbourne: Melbourne University

to the general advocacy of modernism by returned expatriate artists, Thea Proctor and Margaret Preston, a handful of interested middle-class women spontaneously championed Sydney's earliest modernists. The quiet, bourgeois post-impressionist Grace Cossington Smith primarily benefited from the activities of her neighbour Ethel Anderson. Roy de Maistre, an experimental, socially self-conscious modernist also received the attention of Anderson, which combined with that of Lady de Chair, wife of the State Governor, Sir Dudley de Chair, and Elsie Dangar, wife of race-horse owner, Rodney Dangar. In addition, Anderson worked with a number of women from the upper north shore of Sydney to raise interest in the work of the socially retiring, impoverished family man, Roland Wakelin. These women in effect constituted an informal cultural support network that succeeded on numerous occasions in bringing attention to and financial and emotional support for the three modernists who had struggled prior to 1925 to obtain any recognition and acceptance.

Despite the fear of 'revolutionary manias' linked in the collective mind of the art establishment with the modernist *avant-garde* in Europe, their chief form of resistance involved complaint against the predominance of feminine interest in modern art in Sydney. Through the association of artists such as Thea Proctor, Hera Roberts and Margaret Preston who used flat, simplified, designs that suited decorative and commercial applications in modern middle-class women's magazines like *The Home*, stylistic modernism became fashionable.⁴ To the traditionalist trustees and aging plein-airists, the modern woman epitomised by such magazines also threatened gender-roles conceived to

Press, 2000), and for differences in orientation between Sydney and Melbourne, see Bernard Smith, 'Two art systems', in Jim Davidson (ed.), *The Sydney-Melbourne Book*, (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986).

⁴ See Mary Eagle, *Australian Modern Painting between the Wars 1914-1939*, (Kensington, NSW: Bay Books, [1989]), chapter 10, concerning modern art and fashion in the 1920s. See also Roger Butler, 'Proctor, Althea Mary', *ADB*, vol. 11, p.301; Isobel Seivl, 'Preston, Margaret Rose', *ADB*, vol.11, pp.283-5; Peter McNeil, 'Roberts, Hera', Joan Kerr (ed.), *Heritage: The National Women's Art Book*, (Sydney: Craftsman House, 1995), pp.437-8.

guarantee the wholesomeness of national life. Using various strategies, including dismissive or patronising criticism, and refusing to exhibit or acquire women's paintings, the 'self-appointed custodians of culture' resisted most attempts by female artists, modernist or otherwise, to gain validation in the halls of high art.⁵ It is likely that they used similar strategies to resist efforts made by the above female cultural support network to advance the careers of artists they had already rejected. The tendency to ignore the cultural value of the work of female charity fund-raising or entertainment committees by imputing the negative stereotype of 'socialite', is related to the difficulties encountered by Ethel Anderson, Lady de Chair, Elsie Dangar and other women engaged in the promotion of modern art in Sydney from the mid-1920s.

Ethel Anderson and the Cultural Support Network

Born of Australian parents in 1883 near Picton, NSW, Ethel Louise Anderson née Mason (1883-1958) was educated both privately and at Sydney Church of England Girls' Grammar School. She moved first to India and later to England on her marriage in 1904 to the British Army Major Austin Thomas Anderson.⁶ It was in England, during and immediately after the First World War, that Ethel Anderson developed her amateur interest in art into a life-long passion. However, it was only on her return to Australia, in late 1924, that she channelled her creative talents and training into substantially influential cultural activity. Her first campaign in support of a Sydney-based modern artist resulted in fact from her acquaintance with Lady (Enid) de Chair. A connection was first made when

⁵ Caroline Ambrus, *Australian Women Artists: History, Hearsay and Her Say*, (Canberra: Irrepressible Press, 1992); For a discussion of the process through which the trustees of the National Art Gallery New South Wales excluded women from the artistic mainstream in the 1920s, see Pam James, ' "No thank you, but do you have any painted fan decorations?"': Modernist women artists and the gatekeepers of culture', in Maryanne Dever (ed.), *Wallflowers and Witches: Women and Culture in Australia* (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 1994), pp.63-72; and Angela Philp, 'From wallflowers to tall poppies? The Sydney Society of Women Painters, 1910-1934', in Dever, *Wallflowers and Witches*, pp.1-12.

⁶ Martha Rutledge, 'Anderson, Ethel Louise', *ADB*, vol.13, pp.46-47.

Bethia Anderson became acquainted with Elaine de Chair, the daughter of the new State Governor and distinguished British naval officer, Sir Dudley de Chair, while travelling on board the *Diogines* to Sydney.⁷ On her arrival in Sydney Bethia was subsequently absorbed into the young social set revolving around Government House. A few years later, Austin Anderson, by then a Brigadier-General, was appointed to the position of personal secretary to de Chair.⁸ Enid de Chair, the new Governor's wife, was the daughter of the South African gold miner H.W. Struben, and regarded as an able, active, and concerned vice-regal counterpart.⁹

Lady (Enid) de Chair became interested in the work of the modernist artist, Roi de Mestre, when he returned from Europe in late 1925. Roi de Mestre was born at Bowral, NSW, in 1894, to a family reputedly of French aristocratic ancestry, and initially of relative wealth. He first encountered post-impressionism in 1913 when he took up violin, viola, and painting classes in Sydney. As a student attending Dattilo Rubbo's art classes at the Royal Art Society, he became acquainted with Nora Simpson, a fellow student recently returned from Europe with prints and accounts of the artistic experimentation that had taken place there. Also among the students attending Rubbo's classes was the recently married New Zealand-born Roland Wakelin, and the young painter from Turramurra, Grace Cossington Smith. It is clear from Nora Simpson's effect on the three artists that expatriate Australian artists whether conservative or modernist played an important role in the collation and transmission of cultural news and information from Europe.¹⁰

⁷ Chris Cunneen, 'De Chair, Sir Dudley Rawson Stratford', *ADB*, vol. 8, pp.267-8; 'Admiral Sir Dudley de Chair', obituary, *The Times* (London), 19 Aug. 1958, p.10.

⁸ See Bethia Foott, *Ethel and the Governor's General: A Biography of Ethel Anderson (1883-1958) and Brigadier-General A.T. Anderson (1868-1949)*, (Paddington, NSW: Rainforest Publishing, 1992).

⁹ Heather Johnson, 'Chair, Enid de', Kerr, *Heritage*, p.326-7; 'Lady de Chair', obituary, *The Times* (London), 12 Feb. 1966, p.10.

¹⁰ Expatriatism, a problematic subject addressed by numerous cultural historians, raised issues concerning personal loyalty, often provided professional validation to returned artists, and contributed to the transference of both the old and the new in art, the entrenched and the modern. Inevitably individual tastes affected the lessons drawn and later disseminated on return to Australia. Of course the search for

During the war years de Mestre became acquainted with the notion of the therapeutic value of colour through Dr Moffit, who practiced at the Gladesville Mental Hospital. At the same time, he and Wakelin discovered two new books on modern art, one including a chapter on colour theory, which drew substantially on Kandinsky's thoughts on the subject, and the other on the American innovation, synchromism. There is no evidence to suggest that either artist read a series of articles in *Theosophy in Australia* between 1911 and 1913 on the subject of colour music, but they may have indirectly absorbed theosophical theories on form and colour through their reading on Kandinsky. Either way, de Mestre, joined in 1918 by Wakelin, expanded his new interest in colour theory to an exploration of the 'relationship between painting, music and colour'.¹¹ By 1919 the pair had sufficiently consolidated their ideas to loudly proclaim them amid much derision at an exhibition entitled 'Colour in Art'. In introducing the exhibition, they explained that by:

exploring the realm of colour, we have opened for ourselves new avenues of thought and enlarged our consciousness of the fundamentals of life. By giving our experiences concrete form through the medium of pigment, we hope to convey to others the result of our study, that they too may increase their knowledge of life.

Further, they asserted, the 'modernist does not attempt to give colour photography'. Thus they, as modernists, sought to use 'correct' colour combinations in appropriate proportions

independence may have constituted an additional factor in female expatriatism. See Ros Pesman, *Duty Free: Australian Women Abroad*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996); also Smith, *Australian Painting*; John Rickard, *The Past and the Present: Australia a Cultural History*, (London: Longmann, 1988), pp.135-7; and Geoffrey Serle, *From the Deserts the Prophets Come: the Creative Spirit in Australia 1788-1972*, (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1973), pp.124-8. Although Stephen Alomes deals with the period from World War Two to the present, his book, *When London Calls*, demonstrates that expatriatism, particularly to Britain, still remains a revealing cultural practice. See Stephen Alomes, *When London Calls: The Expatriation of Australian Creative Artists to Britain*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

¹¹ See B. Smith *Australian painting*, pp.175-6; Roland Wakelin, 'Post Impressionism in Sydney: Some Personal Reflections', *The AGNSW Quarterly*, vol.3, no.2, Jan. 1962; and Jill Roe, *Beyond Belief: Theosophy in Australia 1879-1939*, (Kensington, NSW: New South Wales University Press, 1986), pp.316-19 concerning artistic interest in colour, form, and music in Sydney during the second decade of the century. Concerned with the personal and ancestral symbolism of names, de Mestre experimented with variations on his name, particularly later in life. From March 1930, Roi de Mestre changed the spelling of his name to Roy de Maistre. The chronologically correct spellings of his name will be used in this paper. See Daniel Thomas,

that would 'constitute a unity'.¹² On the proclamation of such theories Howard Ashton branded their theories as 'elaborate and pretentious bosh' and swore to end the movement.¹³

Amid the flu epidemic of 1919, the counting of the human toll of war, the strikes and uncomfortable adjustment to the idea of being a deeply divided society, such artistic experimentation may have seemed somehow more threatening than it did for Sydney-siders a few years later. With the return of more tolerant expatriates such as the technically skilled portrait painter and war artist George Lambert and an ambivalent openness on the part of the publisher Sydney Ure Smith, it appears that Sydney was more cosmopolitan, less reactionary than Melbourne.¹⁴ Nevertheless, acceptance took many years to win and in the wake of their daring assertions of artistic independence both de Mestre and Wakelin compromised their work a little. By 1923, de Mestre, with a Society of Artist Travelling Scholarship, and Wakelin, as a freelance commercial artist, had both fled to Europe for further training and inspiration.

By the time that Roi de Mestre returned from Europe, he had acquired a renewed commitment to the pretext for modern art and a greater sense of the need to establish his name as an artist. To this end, he corresponded with John Young and Basil Burdett, directors of the Macquarie Galleries, over the summer of 1925-26, concerning the possibility of holding a solo exhibition. It was in connection with the same proposed exhibition that Lady de Chair as the wife of the State Governor made the first of her Antipodean forays into artistic patronage.¹⁵ As de Mestre was born and raised at Sutton

'De Maistre, LeRoy Leveson Laurent Joseph', *ADB*, vol.8, pp.277-78 for full details. For more biographical information on Roland Wakelin, see Barry Pearce, 'Wakelin, Roland Shakespeare', *ADB*, vol.12, pp.350-51.

¹² [Roland Wakelin], 'Colour in Art', typescript text of speech, 1919, in File 1.1 – Biographical file, Roy de Maistre Curatorial file, AGNSW Archives.

¹³ Roland Wakelin, 'Recollections of a Post Impressionist', in *Art in Australia (AA)*, vol.4, no.4, March, 1967, p.291.

¹⁴ Serle, *From the Deserts*, p.97.

¹⁵ Roy de Maistre to John Young, 1 Jan. 1926; 22 Jan. 1925 [sic. 1926?]; 'Saturday' [24 Jan. 1926?],

Forest in the Southern Highlands, the Dangars and the Johnsons, who owned properties in the area, were well acquainted with his family. When the de Chairs repaired to *Hillview*, the near-by vice-regal summer residence, they socialised with the same people. De Mestre inevitably came to their notice. Lady de Chair immediately displayed receptiveness to de Mestre's art, and endeavoured to interest potential patrons in de Mestre and his work. Years later, Bethia Anderson recalled that Lady de Chair would attend 'every art gallery, and every exhibition she heard of', and invite 'those painters whose work she admired', to large social events, and introduce them 'with dignity to men and women who she felt could help them, either by buying their pictures for their own private collections or by asking them to their houses to meet yet more people'.¹⁶

Lady de Chair's support of Roi de Mestre followed these lines. She insisted on making her support of his artistic directions publicly known. 'She seems anxious to associate herself with Modern Art and mine in particular', de Maistre explained to Young. '[I]t seems appropriate and admirable to give her the opportunity to stand for what we believe is right'.¹⁷ On 6 April 1926, Lady de Chair thus opened de Mestre's first solo exhibition. In defining his work as 'entirely representative of the modern outlook' and stating directly her desire to encourage such an artist, the Governor's wife in her vice-regal capacity deliberately challenged the generally conservative and parochial art-lovers of Sydney. She did so in spite of her husband's confession that no position required 'more tact and ability' than 'the Wife of a new Governor coming into a strange community where there are inevitably opposing factors'.¹⁸ In an imperious manner she declared that, 'the "modern" movement ha[d] come to stay', and continued, '[w]e must all adjust our

in Folder 13, Roy de Maistre, John Young and Macquarie Galleries Papers (JYP), MS 1995.9, AGNSW Archives.

¹⁶ Foott, *Ethel*, p.164.

¹⁷ de Maistre to Young, 22 Jan. 25 19[?], JYP, pp.2-3.

¹⁸ 'Admiral Sir Dudley De Chair, K.C.B., K.C.M.G., M.V.O. Memoirs, 1924 to 1926, vol. VI

viewpoint to it or we shall be left ignominiously behind in the march of progress'. As for de Mestre, she speculated with partial accuracy that in the near future Paris would seek to 'claim [him] as a French artist', and that 'his pictures [would be] valuable in time to come'. Perhaps as a display of the 'tact' of which her husband boasted, de Chair added that she did not mean that she approved of 'the extraordinary stuff one sometimes sees in French or American magazines'.¹⁹ Although de Mestre retreated from the portrayal of abstract relationships in visual form and despite Lady de Chair's role in opening the exhibition, the papers did not greet de Mestre's one-man show with enthusiasm. When paintings he entered in the Contemporary Group exhibition held at the Grosvenor Gallery later that year were, according to General Anderson, 'brutally attacked by the papers', Ethel Anderson jumped to his defence.²⁰

As a result of the Andersons' links with the vice-regal family and Ethel Anderson's particular passion for art, the development of a direct friendship with Roi de Mestre was inevitable. On a personal level, the Andersons demonstrated their support of the much-maligned artist by alternately inviting him to *Ball Green* for a meal, an evening, or even for a few days at a time. Austin also frequently met de Mestre for weekday lunches in the city. Together, Austin and Ethel considered ways of alleviating de Mestre's financial troubles. At one time they thought of offering him the stables at the rear of their house for use as a studio to relieve him of the cost of the room he rented in Burdekin House on Macquarie Street. More practically, they arranged for him to teach lessons on his unique theories of painting to their daughter Bethia, and de Mestre's own distant twin cousins,

(Australia 1)', in Admiral Sir Dudley de Chair Papers, P.40, P.41, Imperial War Museum, London, p.32.

¹⁹ *SMH*, 7 April 1926, p.12.

²⁰ Foott, *Ethel*, p.134. The *Bulletin*, observed that de Maistre had 'been caught by the French neo-impressionist school', and attempted to eliminate his credentials in one swift stroke, by asserting that he 'evidently believe[d] it to be his duty to uppercute orthodoxy whenever he can'. See *Bulletin*, 8 April 1926, p.34. Noting the *Bulletin*'s response to the Contemporary Group's exhibition, Anderson labelled the criticism as 'abuse' and de Mestre's paintings 'masterpieces'. See Ethel Anderson, 'Art – and an Artist', *Bulletin*, 20 Jan. 1927, p.3.

Gwen and Jean Ramsay, who lived in the neighbourhood.²¹ The de Chairs also employed this more direct strategy, simultaneously indulging Sir Dudley de Chair's own penchant for painting, by arranging for Roi to show the Governor 'the rudiments of oil painting'. The Governor in fact sat for a portrait by de Mestre, and escaped from the city on occasion to do a little of his own painting at the Andersons.²²

To compensate for the critical reception that de Mestre received at the hands of the press Anderson teamed up with Elsie Dangar in 1928 to organise another solo exhibition. Rodney Dangar, owner of the Melbourne-cup winning racehorse Peter Pan, and his wife, Elsie Dangar, already knew de Mestre as the child of a neighbour. Rodney Dangar, like Dudley de Chair who confessed his preference for paintings by George Lambert, Lionel Lindsay's water-colours, and Hans Heysen's landscapes,²³ clung to established notions favouring realism in art. His wife, however, shared Ethel Anderson's sympathy for modernism. She encouraged her husband to purchase de Mestre's work and selected some herself to use in connection with her charity work.²⁴ Elsie Dangar's example demonstrates that although the male art connoisseurs of Sydney entertained more doubts concerning modern art than their enthusiastic wives these women were able to persuade their husbands to extend their patronage. Years later, following the sudden death of Elsie Dangar, Anderson wrote:

²¹ Austin Thomas Anderson's diary entries, while brief, reveal the frequency with which the Andersons met de Mestre in the year following his first solo exhibition. See Austin Anderson diaries, 1926-1928, in Anderson Family, Ethel Louise Anderson Papers, ML MSS 5294 (ELAP), box 25(44). Also, Foott, *Ethel*, p.134.

²² Sir Dudley de Chair, *Memoirs*, p.78, and Austin Anderson, diary, 1 Dec. 1927. The portrait now hangs in Government House as a result of Ethel's suggestion to Austin, who had arranged a committee to raise funds for and commission a portrait of Sir Philip Game. With the small amount of excess funds, they thus rescued de Chair's portrait from a gallery storeroom. See Foott, *Ethel*, p.186.

²³ De Chair explained, 'I enjoyed the more traditional style and Enid the old and more modern as well'. See Sir Dudley de Chair, *Memoirs*, pp. 57, 78.

²⁴ Dangar supported various Nursery and Kindergarten movements. See Foott, *Ethel*, pp.164-65.

She was really my best friend. The only one I could talk about pictures with; the only one who could show me something really beautiful – a picture. [sic] That gave me absolute pleasure; my sort of art...²⁵

The Dangars also encouraged Roi de Mestre in numerous informal ways. Following the death of Betty Cutts (nee Dangar) in 1966, her daughter Virginia Lindsay wrote to de Mestre concerning a number of paintings by him that remained in the family's possession. They included a 'small pair of the Hawkesbury River bridge [sic] painted on Dangar Island'. It is possible that these were painted in October 1927 when Roi de Mestre and Bethia Anderson joined the de Chairs for a few days at Palm Beach and took daily excursions around Broken Bay. However, the artist, a family friend, also painted building scenes in Point Piper, two of which 'always hung at 8 Wentworth Street Point Piper' and later in Lindsay's grandfather's house in Newcastle. Both her grandmother ('Mrs R. N. [Elsie] Dangar') and her mother treasured the paintings. They also carefully preserved photos of de Mestre with various Dangar family members taken during the Sutton Forest days, along with two of 'The "de Mestre" Colour Harmonising Disc[s]'.²⁶ It thus appears that both Elsie and her daughter recognised something of de Mestre's significance as a modernist, encouraged his experiments and valued his creations. In 1928, Dangar and Anderson joined to express their mutual appreciation of modern art, and de Mestre in particular, by organising and paying for the hire of the Macquarie Galleries for his second solo exhibition. They were assisted financially by Mrs Johnson, another neighbour of de Mestre's childhood days, while Lady de Chair found among her numerous contacts more supporters and possible patrons for her protégé.²⁷

²⁵ Ethel Anderson to Lady Gowrie, 'Tuesday' [1943], in Gowrie, Sir Alexander Hore-Ruthven, 1st Earl, Papers, NLA MS 2852, 1st batch, series 5, p.44a.

²⁶ Virginia Lindsay (Mrs Warwick Lindsay) to de Maistre, 26 May 1967, in 'Letters to Roy de Maistre, 1923-67', John Rothenstein Papers, Tate Gallery Archives 8726.4 (TGA), 8726.4.61.

²⁷ Foott, *Ethel*, pp.134-36; and 'Betty Foott' to Sir John Rothenstein, 25 Aug. 1971, in 'File on the Work and Estate of Roy de Maistre, 1966-86', TGA 8726.4.69.

Unfortunately, the art establishment persisted in its incomprehension and derision. Further attempts to raise interest in the artist's work dwindled and, losing patience with his homeland, de Maistre left for London in March 1930, never to return. Despite his absence Ethel maintained her interest in his artistic progress. She arranged for the sale of works left by de Maistre at a local framing shop, and reported on his successes abroad. When Austin raised subscriptions for a portrait of Sir Philip Game the excess funds, no doubt under Ethel's influence, were used to purchase de Mestre's portrait of Sir Dudley de Chair.²⁸ In April 1937, Anderson assisted Dangar with the organisation of a loan exhibition of de Maistre's work that used his by then more popular name to help raise funds for charity.

In an effort to expand the support network abroad, Ethel Anderson wrote to her London contacts in search of possible British patrons for de Maistre. Austin Anderson's old school friend, Sir Charles Holmes, a former Slade lecturer in fine arts at Oxford, previously Director at the National Portrait Gallery, and recently retired Director of the National Gallery, London, met with de Maistre, at Ethel's request.²⁹ Holmes dutifully wrote to her following the meeting, with his favourable impressions of the modernist, and carefully noted the episode in his diary. Holmes expressed regret that he was unable to meet with de Maistre on other occasions.³⁰ His correspondence with fellow senior bureaucrats of the British art world suggests that he did not make further efforts to

²⁸ See also Austin Anderson, diary, 17 Dec. 1935, ELAP, box 28. Also, Daniel Thomas to de Mestre, 9 Feb. 1961, in TGA 8726.4.61. Thomas mentioned that another painting was left at the framing shop with a note attached to it indicating that it was not for sale as it belonged to de Mestre, and the owners had 'been patiently waiting for instructions since 1930'. By the time Dangar arranged a loan exhibition of de Maistre's work in 1937 to raise funds for the Sydney Day Nursery Association, his work was regarded without horror, and understood with such ease it no longer seemed progressive. Heather Johnson, *Roy de Maistre: The English Years 1930-1968*, (Sydney: Craftsman House, 1995), p.59.

²⁹ C. H. Collins Baker, 'Holmes, Sir Charles John', *Dictionary of National Biography 1931-40*, pp.439-40, copy in Sir Charles John Holmes file, Heinz Archive and Library, National Portrait Gallery, London.

³⁰ C. Holmes to Ethel Anderson, 12 May 1930; 1 July 19[1930], in ELAP, box 6, folder 2 'Letters 1930-1941', and Sir Charles John Holmes, Diaries and notebook, bay 26, National Portrait Gallery, Heinz Archive and Library, London. On 12 May 1930, he noted 'had de Mestre to lunch. With him to Lefebvre's Su-real Show and Christie's... wrote Mrs Anderson'.

encourage receptiveness to de Maistre's work.³¹ Instead, it was the modernist Francis Bacon, who offered both his friendship and patronage to the Australian painter. In time, John Rothenstein, as the Tate Gallery Curator, also rose to champion de Maistre, ranking the Australian among the most interesting and notable artists in Britain at the time.³² In the years immediately after Roy de Maistre's arrival in London, Lady de Chair who had by then also returned to England was in a better position to persist in her expressions of interest in his career. In fact, she engaged him in the task of painting wall panels for her flat. Debate surrounds the extent of his involvement in this project. De Maistre did, on more than one occasion, visit the de Chairs, both at their Chelsea flat, and their renovated country estate.³³ Despite their continued interest, the influence of de Maistre's Australian patrons diminished as his British career gained momentum.

The possibilities inherent in the feminine cultural network that arose to champion Roi de Maistre found further grounds for manifestation in the case of Roland Wakelin. Wakelin had been one of the first Australians to exhibit a painting displaying post-impressionist traits in the quivering effects of the broken brush stroke of *Down the Hills to Berry's Bay*, first exhibited in 1916. While de Maistre had won a Travelling Scholarship and the financial support of Society women in the 1920s, Wakelin, a married man with two children was also more modest and uncomfortable in such company. Also, his family commitments demanded a steady income. Thus he turned to commercial work and

³¹ D.S. MacColl, Art History Papers/85, Special Collections, Glasgow University Library. MacColl was a member of the board of trustees of Tate Gallery in the 1920s and 30s, and corresponded regularly with Holmes concerning artists, acquisitions, gallery policies and various debates current in the London art world. Holmes did not at any time mention de Maistre to MacColl. This does not conclusively show that he did not attempt to curry favour for the Australian, but it does suggest that he did not champion Roy de Maistre.

³² The possibility that the Anderson's friendship with Rothenstein's father, Sir William Rothenstein, played a role in this significant source of English patronage, can only be a topic for speculation, as no correspondence exists in the Anderson papers to confirm it. Bethia Foott (nee Anderson) confirmed her parent's acquaintance with Sir William when writing to John Rothenstein with details relating to de Maistre's career, but her letters do not indicate an intention on her parent's behalf to enlist his support. See B. Foott to Sir John Rothenstein, 25 Aug. 1971, TGA, 8726.4.69.

³³ Deborah Edwards, 'de Maistre: Master of Colour. Major Society Gift', *Look*, June 1993, pp.14-17.

struggled not to lose his creative vision in the mundane search for appropriate illustrative ideas:

I just sit here all day trying to do drawings that will persuade people to drink Gilbeys Gin or buy a wireless set ... Sometimes in the morning before I come in on Sundays I paint in much the same way as others do gardening or play tennis – a harmless and useless hobby.³⁴

Ethel Anderson appears to have developed connections with Wakelin later than with de Maistre and independent of the network that worked to further the career of the latter. It is unclear exactly when she first encountered the struggling artist. She wrote positively about his first solo exhibition in March 1925. However, Austin Anderson's diaries indicate that 'Wakelin, the artist' first visited *Ball Green* on 22 July 1928. A month after Wakelin's visit Ethel opened her second solo exhibition and submitted a persuasive review to the *Sydney Morning Herald*.³⁵

Over the ensuing years Ethel Anderson went to extraordinary lengths to raise interest in Wakelin's work. The first of these efforts involved turning her Turramurra home, Ball Green, into an exhibition gallery. It followed a particularly low point in Wakelin's career. In April 1930, he wrote of a small show at the Modern Art Centre founded by Dorrit Black and Grace Crowley in Sydney in words of bitter resignation, 'it arouses little enthusiasm in me and less perhaps in any body else. And why should it? Everybody is interested in science, the intellect, and all that, especially if it will bring them in money.'³⁶ Thus, in September 1930, Ethel Anderson held a one-man show in her home. In Bethia Anderson's words:

A selection of cuttings, correspondence and research notes on the subject are also held in the Roy de Maistre Curatorial File, AGNSW Archives.

³⁴ Roland Wakelin to John Young, 2 April 19[1930, 'while John in England'], in Folder 56 – Roland Wakelin, JYP, AGNSW Archives.

³⁵ Austin Anderson, diary, 22 July 1928; 23 July 1928; 23 Aug. 1928. See also, Leslie Walton, *The Art of Roland Wakelin*, (Sydney: Craftsmen House, 1987), pp.121, 124.

³⁶ Roland Wakelin to John Young, 2 April 19[1930], JYP, AGNSW Archives.

In order to provide space to show [Wakelin's] lovely pictures, the furniture from our drawing room and dining room, from my bedroom, a spare room and the hall, had to be stacked on the verandahs, where my bed was wedged between a bookcase and the sofa ... The house was kept open for a fortnight; Gwen and Jean and I, with Gracie and Enid Cambridge, had charge of one room each, where we lectured at set times, on modern art – the knowledge, for us three younger ones hastily drummed into us by Mother – while my parents took it in turns to welcome everyone by our front door.³⁷

'Everyone' included 'busloads of school children', art gallery trustees, press representatives, friends and neighbours. The network of helpers consisted chiefly of women artists from respectable upper north shore families. Although the event reportedly attracted over a thousand people during the two weeks, and numerous press reports, few sales resulted. Wakelin nevertheless felt that it 'had its effect'.³⁸ At the opening of a Contemporary Group exhibition several weeks later, the artist John Moore paid tribute to the rare opportunity that Ethel Anderson's generosity had offered to Wakelin, to 'see all one's work hung together'.³⁹

A consistent patron, Ethel Anderson did not end her efforts with the one event. A second 'At Home' held in November 1931 featured Wakelin, Grace Cossington Smith and the Ramsay twins, and in 1934, she arranged a one-man exhibition at the Macquarie Galleries. A committee consisting of the same network of women artists from the upper north shore assisted her, although, according to the catalogue, the exhibition 'was made possible by 16 gentlemen'. According to Wakelin's biographer, Leonie Walton, the 1934 exhibition was the first one at which he sold a 'good number' of paintings.⁴⁰ Reminiscing about his struggles Wakelin thought that 'it was in 1935 that I had quite a successful exhibition, that is, financially'.⁴¹ Although the NAGNSW acquired its first Wakelin

³⁷ Foott, *Ethel*, p.150.

³⁸ Roland Wakelin, Hazel de Berg interview, transcript, copy in ADB Roland Wakelin file.

³⁹ *Daily Pictorial*, 13 Nov. 1930, p.19.

⁴⁰ Walton, *Art of Roland Wakelin*, p.130. See also Ethel Anderson to Ronald McNichol, 'Monday [1934]', in ELAP, box 13, folder 3 for reference to the mysterious sixteen men.

⁴¹ Wakelin, de Berg interview, NLA transcript in ADB Wakelin files.

painting, *Mount Wellington, Tasmania* in 1935, no solo exhibition was held that year. Therefore it is likely that the 1934 exhibition represented the turning point in Wakelin's career. In the same year '[h]e was elected a member of the Society of Artists' at which point 'his long-standing adversary, Howard Ashton, resigned in protest'.⁴²

Significantly, Wakelin tended to see the years 1933 to 1937 as the golden years of his career. When faced with a resurgence of rejection and misunderstanding during the Second World War, he wistfully recalled 'the cheers of 1933-37'.⁴³ Ethel Anderson's chief direct contributions to his career took place between 1930 and 1935. Although the Macquarie Gallery director John Young actively encouraged art dealers to buy Wakelin's work, the solo and Contemporary Group exhibitions held at the Macquarie Galleries from 1925 onward attracted poor attendances. Meanwhile, Wakelin's contributions to the annual exhibitions of the Society of Artists and Royal Art Society were regularly criticised. From 1928 he sought to use the print media to educate the public and create additional support, yet even the tolerant proprietor of *Art in Australia*, Sydney Ure Smith, still expressed doubts during this period concerning such art, favoured milder experimentations and ultimately preferred Lambert above all.⁴⁴

The Andersons' 1930 'At Home' perhaps offered the first opportunity for Wakelin to gain exposure in a supportive environment. Many of the people attending would have been primed for the occasion by Anderson and her network. It certainly appealed to men and women of her milieu if only for the Andersons' example, and drew on a conservative segment of society that felt a duty to cultural custodianship. Indeed Ethel, a loyal General's wife, honoured the nobility of soldiers, and abhorred 'Red Russia', 'Republican

⁴² Douglas Dundas, 'Roland Wakelin. The Painter' *Art and Australia*, vol.4, no.4, March 1967, p.282. See also Pearce, Wakelin, *ADB*.

⁴³ Wakelin to John Young, 'Wednesday [no month or year]', in JYP, AGNSW Archives.

⁴⁴ Nancy Underhill, *Making Australian Art 1916-1949: Sydney Ure Smith Patron and Publisher*, (Melbourne: Oxford University Press), p.96.

Spain', and Catholic Ireland. The General himself considered becoming a national party candidate, was an active member of both the Big Brother Movement and the Turramurra Community League, an organisation formed by business and community leaders in 1925. He interacted, at least socially, with his neighbours, Eric Campbell (of New Guardist fame) and his wife, Nancy.⁴⁵ The art establishment also drew a number of its own members and patrons from the area. Lionel Lindsay lived one stop further up the train line at Wahroonga, while the upper leafy side of Turramurra colonised from the late nineteenth century by architects, merchants, and solicitors, had been home to a number of art gallery trustees, including Eccleston du Faur and John Sulman.⁴⁶ Despite the conservative orientation of the community, the network that served to arrange these events consisted of other artists, albeit well-supported daughters and wives, rather than prominent female social figures. The absence of high-profile women suggests that the shy and awkward Wakelin did not personally attract fashionable supporters. By the 1934 exhibition, held in a gallery in the city, with its greater emphasis on professional male patronage, following four years of increased exposure at the hand of Ethel Anderson, Wakelin had gained the much hoped for goal of substantial financial validation of his work, and official recognition both through membership of the Society of Artists and acceptance of a work by the NAGNSW. Undoubtedly these personal triumphs had much to do with Ethel Anderson's intervention and personal influence.

Ethel Anderson's role in the progress of Grace Cossington Smith's career is readily identifiable. It was both coincidental and fortuitous that when the Andersons arrived in

⁴⁵ Ethel Anderson to Miss [Dorothy] Mackellar, unposted letter dated 15 June 1931, in ELAP, box 6, folder 2; Austin Anderson diaries for 1925-30, ELAP, box 25; 'Smith's Snob', 'The Social Register – No 4: Brig.-Gen. Anderson', [1940], cutting in ELAP, box 28, scrapbook, n.p.; and Geoffrey Sherington, University of Sydney, conference paper, 'Youth, Migration and the Future: Little Brothers and Big Brothers in Australia 1925-39', Australian Historical Association Conference, Adelaide, 5-9 July 2000.

⁴⁶ See assorted documents by Margaret Wyatt in Ku-ring-gai Municipal Library Local Studies Collection, 'Local Studies Resource Folder', no.1.

Sydney in 1925, they happened to move into *Ball Green*, in Ku-ring-gai Avenue, barely a hundred metres away from the home of the quiet modernist painter Grace Cossington Smith. The artist and the art-lover first made contact in March 1925, when Grace Smith (the mother), and her daughter, Grace, paid a visit to their new neighbours. Returning the visit a few days later, Anderson was offered the opportunity to visit Cossington Smith's garden studio. The pair re-emerged after a considerable length of time, engaged in an animated discussion of the concepts of 'space composition' and the possibility of a 'fourth dimensional emotion'. It was a subject that Anderson returned to later, defining modern art as a movement which 'seeks to give expression to a quality in life more moving than beauty, more exacting than truth more intimate than infinity – a fourth dimensional emotion as yet unnamed'.⁴⁷ It appears that Smith, a devout Anglican and regular churchgoer, shared Anderson's convictions that art should seek to portray less tangible subjects rather than simply the beauty of nature. Although the Smith family accepted and encouraged her artistic bent, and Grace Smith senior displayed a nurturing complicity in some ways reminiscent of Susannah Franklin's, it appears that they had no comprehension of the significance of 'Gracie's' work, the intellectual depth of her art, nor of the extent of her ability. Certainly the art critics did not. In Drusilla Modjeska's words, Anderson understood Smith's sensibility; 'what it meant to dwell in a zone that was not quite one or the other, betwixt and between; she knew its solitariness, its desires, and its edgy pleasures'.⁴⁸ The encouragement this new friendship offered both women cannot be underestimated. It constitutes a significant factor contributing to the consolidation of Smith's artistic direction in the mid-1920s. For Ethel Anderson, her propensity to revel in

⁴⁷ Ethel Anderson, 'Critics, and Emile-Othon Friesz', *Bulletin*, 18 March 1926, p.3. Also see Foott, *Ethel*, pp.129-30.

⁴⁸ See Drusilla Modjeska, *Stravinsky's Lunch*, (Sydney: Picador, 1999), p.271, and p.286 concerning Mrs Smith's support of her daughter's artistic aspirations. See also Anne Speer, 'Ethel Anderson, Pioneer Supporter of Sydney's Post-Impressionism', MA thesis, English Department, University of Sydney, 1994.

the various physical and mental applications of art was unintentionally gratified through the acquisition of an artistic neighbour in the unassuming person of Grace Cossington Smith.

Ethel Anderson encouraged Grace Cossington Smith from the moment of their first meeting. Publicly she first promoted Grace's artistic credentials during her first solo exhibition in 1928. At the second 'At Home' held at *Ball Green*, in 1931, Anderson announced that Grace Cossington Smith's work had been hung in the New English Art Club in London, and that she planned to hold an exhibition at Walkers Galleries, also in London, the following year.⁴⁹ Demonstrating through her reference to Smith's English plans her understanding of the dynamics of conservative reticence concerning modern art, Anderson aimed to allay contemporary fears that socialist forces were at work in the Sydney art community. Arranged jointly by Ethel Anderson and another art patron, Gladys MacDermot, Cossington Smith's London exhibition, held in March 1932, served to boost her credentials as a professional artist. The Queen attended the exhibition, no doubt to the royalist Smith's great delight. Reviews appeared in numerous English papers including *The Times*, *The Morning Post*, and *The Yorkshire Post*.⁵⁰ Anderson also succeeded in having an article published in the in-house journal, *Walker's Monthly*.⁵¹

Later in the same year, Government House hosted a Garden fete in aid of the Bush Nursing Association. At that stage, Sir Philip and Lady (Gwendolyn) Game had replaced the de Chairs at the vice-regal residence. Austin Anderson, on the de Chairs' recommendation, remained private secretary, retaining also his office at Government House, next to the Governor's, and endearing himself in the meantime to the new vice-

⁴⁹ Foott, *Ethel*, p.150; *SMH*, 23 Nov. 1931, p.4.

⁵⁰ 'Show Methods of Three Artists. Pictures Hung in Solid Masses. Neglect of Drawing', *Morning Post* (London), 26 April 1932.

⁵¹ Ethel Anderson, 'Happy Pictures by a Young Australian Artist', *Walkers Monthly*, April 1932, p.3.

regal family. Lady Game felt keenly her social responsibilities as the Governor's wife, and sincerely believed that she offered too little to the city that welcomed her. At the same time she was keenly aware of the symbolic nature of her role, 'a nice wax-doll ... squeak[ing] out a few platitudes' at the push of a button 'would do just as well'. Slow as the process was, she mustered enough interest to oversee a Garden Fete in aid of the Bush Nursing Association. It remained one of the highlights of her community service in Sydney.⁵² Ethel Anderson used the opportunity and her acquaintance with Lady Game to arrange, together with Mrs A.C. Goddard also of Turramurra, an art exhibition to coincide with the fete. Anderson personally invited twenty-five artists to contribute to the exhibition, and was keenly aware of their sacrifices, considering the impact of the Depression on their ever-moderate sales.⁵³ Naturally Smith as well as other modernists submitted work for the exhibition. It also involved her in an unusual and possibly uncomfortable capacity as a member of the hanging committee, which included representatives of the art establishment such as trustee and painter Sydney Long, the etcher, publisher and trustee Sydney Ure Smith and critic Douglas Pratt. Lady Isaac, wife of the Governor General, attended the affair and purchased a picture from the exhibition. While no records state explicitly which exhibit she chose, it appears that she appreciated Smith's painting, as the artist shortly afterwards received an invitation to visit *Yarralumla*, the Canberra residence of the Governor General, in order to give Lady Isaacs lessons in painting.⁵⁴

⁵² Rosemary Archer-Burton (daughter of Sir Philip and Gwendolyn Game), interview conducted by Jane Hunt, 9 Sept. 1998, Hungerford, Wiltshire, England; and Gwendolyn Game to Eleanor Hughes-Gibb [her mother], 13 June 1932; undated [Dec. 1933 – Jan. 1934], in Game Family Papers, ML MSS 2166, vol. 5. Her emphasis.

⁵³ Ethel Anderson to Lady Game, 22 Aug. 19[1932], in ELAP, box 7, folder 3 'Letters, n.d'..

⁵⁴ *Government House Garden Fete*, 6, 7 Oct. 1932, souvenir programme (Sydney, 1932); and Bruce James, *Grace Cossington Smith*, (Sydney: Craftsman House, 1990), p.97.

Both the London exhibition and the garden fete intrinsically linked Ethel Anderson and the artist to not only fashionable social circles, but to the height of Sydney Society. It is not surprising that Grace Cossington Smith engaged in such activities. She belonged to a conservative and quietly affluent family, and clung to the domestic sphere with great affection. As curator of the AGNSW, Daniel Thomas first pointed out that this might have led the art world to perceive Grace as a 'genteel amateur'. This is quite likely. Critics condemned with faint praise the early modernist works entered by Smith in exhibitions during the war years in a similar vein to their appraisal of less adventurous artwork submitted by members of the Society of Women painters. They only levelled stronger criticism when mistaking her ambiguous signature 'G Cossington Smith' as that of a male contributor.⁵⁵ Modjeska evokes the touching image of Smith reading the cruelest reviews to her gentle father, and confirms that their memory stayed with her to the end of her years.⁵⁶

The independent-minded Grace Cossington Smith was nevertheless detached from the views and misapprehensions of the established art world. Daniel Thomas, who, as curator for the Art Gallery of New South Wales from the 1960s, played an important role in the recovery of her work for its collection, asserted that slow recognition resulted in part from her 'quiet temperament'.⁵⁷ In fact, it appears that from the mid-1920s onwards she deliberately sought to distance herself from the art world in general. With heavy underlining, she copied several paragraphs written by Hans Heysen into one of her sketchbooks:

I believe isolation is a good thing for an artist: he has a chance of finishing himself and is not always too anxious to paint for exhibitions. In fact, one does not realise

⁵⁵ This uneven critical practice is discussed in further detail in my honours thesis, 'Grace Cossington Smith: A Cultural Paradox?', BA Hons thesis, University of Western Sydney Macarthur, 1995.

⁵⁶ Modjeska, *Stravinsky's Lunch*, p.278.

⁵⁷ Daniel Thomas, 'Smith, Grace Cossington', in *ADB*, vol. 11.

the mannerism or artificiality of most of the so-called clever work until one has lived quietly and been compelled to depend upon oneself.⁵⁸

These few sentences seem to have touched a chord with Smith. Her emotional appreciation of Heysen's opinion is further indicated by her emphasis on the following sentence, 'I can say that I am happy in isolation (away from most art matters)'. Thus, through these few lines, the reclusive artist conveyed exactly how she felt about her art, and throughout her life maintained her detachment from the art world. In fact, she told a journalist in 1968 that she 'never tried to be an "ism"', and that she avoided talking to other artists. She confessed to Daniel Thomas that she did not 'believe in going about and looking at other painter's exhibitions. I see no reason why an artist should not paint well almost in isolation'.⁵⁹

Together Anderson as a patron and Smith as an artist seemed to by-pass and therefore make almost irrelevant the art establishment's opinion of Smith's work. This process is further demonstrated by the Art Gallery of New South Wales' eventual acquisition of the painting *Wildflowers*. It resulted from a petition of 'twenty admirers of the artist's work' master-minded by the intrepid Anderson. Aware of Smith's ongoing obscurity, Anderson wrote to and enlisted the support of 'Lady Wakehurst, Lady Fairfax, Lady Owen, Sir H. Manning and Professor Waterhouse', who had all previously bought pictures by Smith. At short notice, she also invited Major General Ronald McNichol, another of her husband's life-long friends, with whom she had corresponded regularly concerning his own efforts at wood-carving, and who, through the purchase of a painting, had shown an early confidence in Smith's work, to join the campaign. Although the

⁵⁸ Grace Cossington Smith, sketchbook no.3, National Art Gallery, Canberra, c.early 1920s, n.p., underlining by Smith. For further information on the contents of the 51 sketchbooks in the possession of the National Gallery of Australia, see Daniel Thomas, *Grace Cossington Smith: A Life from Drawings in the Collection of the National Gallery of Australia*, (Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1993).

⁵⁹ *Bulletin*, 15 June 1968, p.6, and Thomas, 'Introduction' in *Grace Cossington Smith*, (1973), p.6.

gallery director, Will Ashton, seemed 'disinterested to the point of boredom' when Anderson approached him with her petition, he forwarded it to the next board meeting, at which the trustees gratefully accepted *Wildflowers* the painting selected by the admirers for that purpose.⁶⁰

This episode confirms much about Grace Cossington Smith's patrons, and the quarters in which she achieved a reputation as an artist of distinction. Curiously, despite her regular involvement in the Society of Artists annual exhibitions from 1927, the society's records show that she sold her first work in March 1933, and made only irregular sales throughout the ensuing decade.⁶¹ Her circle of buyers thus seems to have consisted mostly of influential people with titles before their names. Their purchases also appear to have taken place away from the context of mainstream art shows. This may explain why Heather Johnson, in her survey of art patronage in Sydney, primarily based on the records of societies, institutions and art dealers, identified only a few significant sources of direct patronage of modernist artists.⁶² Critics unwittingly classified Smith as either a modernist in the more subversive sense of the word, or a genteel amateur who was consequently unworthy of their approbation. Alternately the rich and influential credited Smith as an artist. It does not mean that Smith was any less of a modernist than her mild technical innovations made her, but that her patrons seemed free from the anxieties that prevented the anti-modernist art institutions and reactionary press from recognising her ability. Perhaps the isolationists could argue that the custodians were cultural pretenders.

⁶⁰ Foott, *Ethel*, pp.192-3; and Ethel Anderson to Ronald McNichol, 18 July [1940]; 19 Sept. [1940], ELAP, box 13, folder 3. Also Minutes of the Meeting of the Board of Trustees of NAGNSW, 17 Sept. 1940, p.2156, 11/3165, AGNSW Archives. Ure Smith made the motion to accept the painting selected, and Professor Waterhouse seconded it.

⁶¹ Although the financial records date from 1930, it is unlikely that sales at Society of Artist exhibition from 1927 to 1929 followed a remarkably different pattern. Society of Artists, Financial Records, from 1930, AGNSW Archives, n.p.

⁶² Heather Johnson, *The Sydney Art Patronage System 1890-1940*, (Grays Point, NSW: Bungoona Technologies, 1997); and Heather Johnson, *Art Patronage in Sydney, 1890-1940*, MA (Hons) Thesis, University of Sydney, 1988.

However, her patrons possessed the financial ability to define its own tastes and, when offered convincing arguments in support of modernism by Ethel Anderson, were happy to balance the academic favourites in their collections with artwork that was aesthetically fresh and light.

Evidently Ethel Anderson used existent social structures to create cultural support networks. Social networks could generate enthusiasm and amplify interest in any chosen cause, and could be tapped by whoever felt strongly enough about a particular need to initiate a line of action. Vice-regal patronage helped, together with that of titled men and women and senior business and professional figures, to recommend the cause to the social network, and ultimately to the public. Both Lady de Chair in her concern for Roi de Mestre and Lady Game in fact broke the mould by seeking a direct agency rather than showing symbolic support. The art establishment, however, resisted purely social strategies in the promotion of modern art. Dismissive imputations of frivolity and artistic ignorance mixed in the suggestion that 'socialites' were too readily swayed by fashion. This is well demonstrated in the case of Ethel Anderson, Elsie Dangar and Enid de Chair's patronage of Roy de Maistre, as he called himself after his permanent departure from Sydney.

Catalogues and reviews exist relating to various successful exhibitions held in Britain over the course of Roy de Maistre's English career. They remain strangely silent about his early career in Australia. In planning the 1960 Retrospective exhibition of de Maistre's work, the Whitechapel Art Gallery inadvertently perpetuated misconceptions concerning the artist's Australian career. A draft document entitled 'Biographical notes', whose writer is not identified, states that for the period 1926-29, de Maistre 'returned to Australia where he worked for a period. In 1927 he held his first one-man show in Sydney'. The note further stated that he then returned to London via France in 1929, and

held his first British one-man show at the Beaux-Arts Gallery during that year.⁶³ John Rothenstein in his introduction to the catalogue also confused the dates, identifying 1928 as the year that de Maistre arrived back in London.⁶⁴ By 1968, the story had changed again, and a correct citation stating that de Maistre held his first one-man show in 1926 in Sydney, was followed by the misinformation that the modernist had spent the period 1926-30 in France.⁶⁵ Neither the 1960 nor 1968 catalogue mentioned other exhibitions held in Australia particularly those organised by Ethel Anderson and Elsie Dangar or the brave 1919 Colour-music episode. Worse still, a *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist in 1957 completely overlooked the 1926 exhibition. In Ailsa Craig's account, de Maistre travelled to Europe in 1924, held his first solo exhibition in London in 1929, and the second in Paris a year later.⁶⁶ Sir John Rothenstein at least hinted at the significance of the Australian chapter in the artist's life, 'a chapter longer and more important than most of his friends of more recent date are aware'.⁶⁷ It was in the course of posthumous investigations concerning de Maistre's estate that the Tate Gallery curator discovered the inaccuracies woven into the Australian modernist's life story. Replying to Rothenstein's enquiries, for example, Bethia Foott (nee Anderson) good-humouredly identified the 'Variations on a Theme' inherent in de Maistre's family history. She added gently:

It is a little strange that Roy did not name more of the people who helped him. My mother, Ethel Anderson, gave him his exhibition at the Macquarie Galleries, and it did him a lot of good, making him better known.⁶⁸

It was Heather Johnson, in her comprehensive study, *Roy de Maistre: The Australian Years 1894-1930*, who first pointed to his discomfort with the essentially social

⁶³ 'Biographical Note', in Folder 1 'Catalogue', Roy de Maistre files, Whitechapel Art Gallery Archives, London.

⁶⁴ John Rothenstein, 'Introduction', *Roy de Maistre: A retrospective exhibition of paintings and drawings 1917-1960*, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, May-June, 1960, catalogue, p.8.

⁶⁵ *Roy de Maistre*, catalogue, (Dynevour Castle, Summer Exhibition, 1968), in TGA 8726.4.72.

⁶⁶ Ailsa Craig, 'Bowral to London (Via Cubism)', *SMH*, 2 March 1957, in TGA 8726.4.71.

⁶⁷ Rothenstein, 'Introduction', p.8.

⁶⁸ Bethia Foott to Sir John Rothenstein, 25 Aug. 1971, in TGA 8726.4.69.

nature of the patronage he received in Sydney.⁶⁹ In correspondence with John Young of the Macquarie Galleries concerning his first exhibition, de Maistre intimated Lady de Chair's eagerness to involve herself in its opening. 'She may press this point at any moment', he warned, 'and if I have not arranged for someone else to do it I may find myself in an awkward position if it is not desirable that she should do it'. Later, as Johnson pointed out, de Maistre more directly opposed Lady de Chair's involvement. He preferred someone 'interested in the art and not the artist'.⁷⁰ De Maistre appears to have felt that the patronage of 'socialites' damaged his reputation as a serious artist, and detracted from appreciation of his own artistic journey. His doubts demonstrate the debilitating effect of imputations of social rather than artistic importance. As in the case of Grace Cossington Smith the members of the art establishment appear to have seen the two as mutually exclusive, rather than complementary. Anxious for acceptance as a serious artist, de Maistre likewise implemented such judgements, and cast off the role of social darling and artistic protégé. His situation was complicated by the establishment's conservatism on the question of homosexuality⁷¹, a stance that Anderson did not attempt to assuage. However, the misogyny implied by de Maistre's attempts to distance himself from his female champions was also apparent in a request Wakelin made to Ethel Anderson, when, in 1934, she organised yet another exhibition on his behalf. He explained, 'I do not despise the support of women; ... but I prefer to have none, on my

⁶⁹ Heather Johnson, *Roy de Maistre: the Australian Years*, (Sydney: Craftsman House, 1988), pp.51,

54.

⁷⁰ Roy de Maistre to John Young, 1 Jan. 1926, JYP, AGNSW Archives; and de Maistre to 'Basil and John', [24 Jan. 1926?], JYP, AGNSW Archives, and quoted in full in Johnson, *The Australian Years*, p.54.

⁷¹ See Garry Wotherspoon, *'City of the Plain': History of a gay sub-culture*, (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger, 1991), ch.1 concerning the interwar stereotyping of gay men as effeminate, and pp.63-4 on the relative discreetness of homosexuality in Anglo-Saxon (British and Australian) artistic circles, which contrasted distinctly with the flamboyant assertiveness of the French art world in particular.

committee'. It was in response to this that the obliging Ethel went to great lengths to involve '16 gentlemen' as patrons of the show.⁷²

Sadly, therefore, the long-term impact of the endeavours of Enid de Chair, Elsie Dangar and Ethel Anderson on de Maistre's behalf, has been effaced from the record of his English career, and is difficult to evaluate. This raises the question of the potential hindrance that a combination of class and gender stereotypes inflicted on women seeking cultural agency. We have already seen how such stereotypes affected evaluations of Grace Cossington Smith's worth as an artist, but such issues evidently also affected female patrons that may have been regarded as 'ladies of leisure'. Superimposed on the background of a reactionary artistic establishment resistant to art forms that they believed symbolic of modern European social diseases it is easy to understand why the patronage of these women may have been dismissed as well-meaning but uninformed interference.

Ethel Anderson as Patron

Despite the negative stereotypes, influential women with links to prospective patrons could override the role of the intellectual establishment as the dictators of taste and culture. Forms of cultural custodianship still existed in Sydney. By networking Ethel Anderson tapped those residual custodial forces. She also used a second strategy: education. Towards the first end, she created networks in support of not only two generations of modernist artists, but also mural painters and writers. Instead of plunging whole-heartedly into the social activities indulged in by Sydney's elite in the years immediately following her arrival in Sydney, for example, Ethel Anderson busied herself with a group of moderately talented young women, most of them residents of the upper north shore. These she organised into the amateur group, the Turramurra Wall Painters.

⁷²

Wakelin, quoted in Ethel Anderson to Ronald McNichol, 'Monday [1934]', in ELAP, box 13,

Each Thursday, the members of the group converged at Ball Green for lunch, and proceeded to the unused stable in the garden at the rear of the house, where they experimented with Gauguinesque designs on its freshly white-washed walls. The participants in these meetings included, among others, Gwen and Jean Ramsay; Nancy Campbell, the wife of the New Guardist Eric Campbell; Shirley Bavin, the daughter of the Nationalist state premier Thomas Bavin; and Elaine de Chair. Numerous others found themselves in the studio with a paintbrush thrust in their hands. The slightly older and more professional Grace Cossington Smith also participated. Within the context of the Thursday meetings, however, Anderson and Smith continued their discussions on the philosophical and spiritual possibilities of art.⁷³

The product of this series of lunches featured in an article printed in *The Home*, in November 1927.⁷⁴ The article noted the part altruistic, part educational motives outlined, no doubt emphatically, by Anderson for the journalist, Gwen Spencer. Mural painting offered a constructive use of leisure time for the younger set, and was a service that they could offer to any 'good cause'. It could stimulate both an interest in art itself through a hands-on approach, and an appreciation or at least an awareness of the 'pleasantly refreshing' spacial freedom of the 'style of Gauguin', which Anderson carefully explained suited mural painting better than the restrictive perspective of realism. Admittedly, this freedom led to an almost 'bizarre' and certainly haphazard collection of images on the stable walls at Ball Green united chiefly by the obvious unreality of their subjects and settings. The article also revealed Anderson's hope that the group would ultimately receive an invitation to decorate a church. Anderson thus presented a custodial vision of the moral

folder 3.⁷³ Foott, *Ethel*, pp.132-3.⁷⁴ Gwen Spencer, 'The Mural Painters of Turramurra Showing How the Younger Set, Decoratively Speaking, Have gone to the Wall', *The Home*, Nov. 1927, pp.22-23.

function of art. By combining it with a style questioned for its artistic integrity in the context of a productive feminine pastime, however, the mural painting venture may have contributed to the view that most modernists were women, that they painted as hobbyists and failed to attain distinction as artists.⁷⁵ Instead, the article offered recognition of the seriousness of the artistic endeavours of Grace Cossington Smith and Roi de Mestre, drawing a distinction between their work and the rest of the group.

The stable-painting scheme opened the door to a number of more public mural projects. An invitation from the Turramurra Grammar School led to the painting of an effective representation of a very modern subject, the Harbour Bridge under construction, on one of its school-room walls. Its designers, Gwen and Jean Ramsay, entered a competition for 'mural decorations' and won third prize.⁷⁶ An invitation to undertake the much-hoped-for task of decorating a church followed this success. The day before the Wall Street crash, Ethel and Bethia Anderson, the Ramsay twins, de Mestre, Wakelin and others set to work on the walls of the Children's Chapel at St James' Anglican Church, Sydney. Participation in the project was restricted to ensure the standard of the end product. In addition, Ethel carefully thought out a scheme that drew on both religious themes and localised images, illustrating an old English carol against a backdrop of Sydney Harbour that included the arches of the half-finished bridge. Drawing on a centuries-old religious artistic tradition, the design used gold leaf, both for angelic halos, and for arches that provided structure and framing for the series of harbour scenes. Gauguinesque traits are less prominent in the resultant panels than they were in the stable

⁷⁵ J.S. MacDonald, as director of the NAGNSW at the time that the exhibition of British Contemporary Art was on show there, gave a lecture at Pakies Club. He was reported to have said 'that since the war there had been a tremendous intrusion of women painters. They had always painted badly; very slick as students, but as soon as they got away from instructors they fell off and eventually disappeared'. See *SMH*, 1 May 1933, p.10.

⁷⁶ 'Amateur Mural Painters', cutting from 'Woman's Realm', section of an uncited Sydney paper, in ELA Papers, box 15.

mural, with a neatness of style and tastefulness of arrangement that revealed the influence of fashionable modernism.⁷⁷

The Chapel project, unique in Sydney at the time, confirmed the right of Jean and Gwen Ramsay, as well as Ethel Anderson herself, to the designation of artist, although, once more, this validation occurred away from the halls of cultural orthodoxy. It marked a moment in time when fashion, modernism and the interests of an opportunistic art-lover converged. Afterwards, during the 1930s Anderson received further invitations from other churches in Australasia. These she carried out by herself, on occasion assisted by Jean Ramsay. A photograph of *Ascending Man* commissioned in 1936 for Rev. Charles Oliver of Gundy near Muswellbrook reveals a much less dynamic and adventurous approach to mural design and greater emphasis on the power of symbolism.⁷⁸ By that stage modernist traits were widely known and more readily recognised and perhaps no longer required examples for the purposes of education. This changed emphasis also reveals in Anderson an evolving and eclectic mind that consistently reached out to embrace different ideas and absorb them into a rich tapestry of knowledge and creative vision.

Ethel Anderson's intellectual interest in and commitment to a wide range of artistic concerns, and modern art in particular, is more fully evident in the large number of letters, essays, reviews and articles written in support of the movement and its struggling artists. In these she revealed not only an understanding of the creative impulse motivating experiments with perspective, form, and colour, but a broad knowledge of western artistic

⁷⁷ 'The Children's Chapel, St James' Church, King Street, Sydney', typescript flier in ELAP, box 16; and 'a revival in ecclesiastical art', in *The Home*, 1 Feb. 1930, pp.28-29. See also *St James' 1824-1999*, (published by the Churchwardens of St James' Church Sydney to mark the 175th anniversary of the consecration of the church, 1999), pp.42-3; and Heather Johnson, 'Ethel Anderson', [re the mural], in Kerr, *Heritage*, p.229.

⁷⁸ 'Turramurra Wall Painters at work', source cited as *Herald*, no date; and 'St Matthew's, Gundy. "Ascending Man"', source cited but illegible [*The Scout* ...?], 11 Jan. 1938, both cuttings in ELAP, box 15, package 2 'Cuttings re Anderson activities 1909-40s'; and Austin Anderson diary, 1935, entries for 25 Jan., 20 Feb., in ELAP, box 25 re triptych painted for 'Rabaul church', no name provided, by Bethia and Ethel.

traditions. For example, she agreed with Roy de Maistre's explanation of the philosophical basis for modern art. He concurred with the:

aim of the great modern Masters, primarily to give expression to the things felt rather than seen, and though they must use the same material and subjects that have served the artists of all time, they aim at so complete a re-creation in paint, that the representative attitude, fast giving place to the interpretive, finally arrives at an analysed [sic] synthesis which deals only with fundamental principles such as govern every phase of life, art being a reflection of life in the most profound sense, is an attempt on the part of the artist to express in concrete form, through symbols, his highest concept of what constitutes, for him the Good, the Beautiful and True.⁷⁹

An article published by Anderson in the *SMH* in September 1927 discussed similar concepts. She pointed to the role of art in attempting to convey something of those exact same values – Beauty, Truth and Goodness – ‘which are for us living reflections, emanations, Plato’s shade of a shade – from the Divine Consanance [sic]’. Drawing examples from Leonardo da Vinci Anderson explained that even in his work it was the emphasis on the ‘right relationship of parts’ that created vitality and rhythm, which in turn evoked a ‘timeless reality’ or ‘sublime context’.⁸⁰ De Maistre had in fact penned similar comments before he met Anderson. It is likely that the two discussed them. However it was Anderson who linked them to the myriad of artists known and respected by both cultural custodians and established artists. Casting such ideas in eloquent terms and sophisticated phrases Anderson also conveyed a sense of informed authority.

In her article concerning Wakelin’s 1928 exhibition, Anderson similarly elevated his artistic project above personal idiosyncrasies or its relationship to the local art scene, to place him in the context of Western artistic tradition as a whole. She pointed to the role of art as ‘the only diary civilisation has ever kept’. It was through the arts that Australians

⁷⁹ [Roy de Maistre], untitled typescript draft, undated [early 1926?], in 1.1, Roy de Maistre curatorial file, AGNSW Archives, p.2.

⁸⁰ Ethel Anderson, ‘The Nature of Art’, in a collection of essays by Anderson entitled *Timeless Garden*, (Sydney: Australasian Publishing Co., copyright not dated), pp.123-128. This essay was originally serialised in *SMH*, as ‘Tea-Cup Talks. Art and Nature’, 24 Sept. 1927, p.11; and ‘Tea-Cup Talks: The Beauty of Art’, 1 Oct. 1927, p.11.

knew so much about England, but it was a version of the English past and present that reflected romantic 'literary' concepts. In Australia, she argued, Wakelin was the first artist to detach from this creative tradition and, by focusing on form and colour the first to create a 'beauty which has its own absolute value'. To her, his work thus transcended space and time. It was, 'in essence, universal'.⁸¹ On the occasion of the 1930 'At Home' featuring Wakelin's work, Anderson submitted a column to the glossy *B.P. Magazine* ostensibly produced for passengers travelling aboard Burns Philp ocean liners. Recognised names among those that had attended, purchased or loaned pictures by Wakelin were mentioned, with hints that a hundred other admirers existed, 'disciples of many year's standing'. As many people seemed to find his art difficult she set out to explain the way in which Wakelin had adjusted his technique to achieve 'purely creative art' chiefly by creating rhythm through the balance and contrast of colour and form. As before Anderson related this approach to that of Renoir, Giotto and Leonardo, and cited Charles Holmes in the process. Many Australians, she acknowledged a little condescendingly, found Wakelin's knack for making the familiar 'unfamiliar', difficult.⁸² The accompanying picture of Wakelin's *Marigolds* hardly seemed incomprehensible, but it was a few years yet before he experienced anything like success. The tone of Anderson's report demonstrated her understanding not only of Wakelin's creativity but also the public's hesitation, and the keys to hasten their response: education, example and a little reverse psychology.

Many of these literary and argumentative tactics, 'clever moves', in Modjeska's words,⁸³ recur throughout Anderson's articles and reviews. Whether or not the subject matter directly embraced local artists or exhibitions, the same intelligence, powers of observation, expansive knowledge and eloquence are evident. An assortment of articles on

⁸¹ Ethel Anderson, *SMH*, 8 Sept. 1928, p.13.

⁸² Ethel Anderson, 'Mr Roland Wakelin's Art', *B.P. Magazine*, 1 Dec 1930, p.51

⁸³ Modjeska, *Stravinsky's Lunch*, p.268.

a variety of artistic subjects written for *The Home*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, and *Art in Australia* provide ample proof of her talents, as do semi-regular contributions to *The Home* on entirely different topics made throughout the 1920s and '30s.⁸⁴ Publishers readily accepted her articles.

When Ethel Anderson attempted to publish collections of her poetry or short stories, however, she encountered silent resistance to her claims as an Australian author. In a literary scene that placed 'emphasis on radical, republican, working-class, or at least classless authors', Ethel Anderson, 'a highly sophisticated gentlewoman' was 'an extraordinary figure' with the potential to be negatively stereotyped as an 'aristocratic grande dame'.⁸⁵ Her connections, her ample body, her gaily accessorised ear trumpet (she was deaf), all made the designation seem appropriate. Pointing to the 'critical and even documentary silence about Anderson's poetry', Carol Franklin, in 1992 paid a belated 'tribute to a significant but shamefully neglected Australian poet'.⁸⁶ Her first literary publication, *Squatter's Luck and Other Poems*, which appeared in 1942 was followed by nine books of either essays, fiction or verse including *Indian Tales* (1948) and *At Parramatta* (1956) over the ensuing fifteen years. Once more it appears that negative preconceptions concerning the applied knowledge and intelligence of 'ladies of leisure' hindered immediate recognition of the cultural gems Anderson offered to the people of Sydney and to historians thereafter. In order to properly appraise Anderson's role as a patron, an artist and a writer, and ascertain why she met success as a patron despite institutional prejudices and active resistance, a little of her cultural prehistory is necessary.

⁸⁴ Aside from commentaries on the work of particular artists, Anderson broached more general subjects such as art criticism, modern artists in France, and the philosophy of art. 'Critics, and Emile-Othon Friesz', *Bulletin*, 18 March 1926, p.3; 'Paul Gauguin', *The Home*, vol.5, no.12, Dec. 1924, p.38; 'Tea-cup Talks. Art and Nature', *SMH*, 24 Sept. 1927, p.11; and 'Subject in Art', *AA*, no.29, Sept. 1929, n.p.

⁸⁵ Thompson, *Meanjin*, vol. 23, no.1, 1964, p.97; and J.D. Pringle, 'Foreword', in J.D. Pringle (Compiler), *The Best of Ethel Anderson*, (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973), p.vii.

⁸⁶ Carol Franklin, 'An Australian Eclogue Book: Ethel Anderson's "Squatter's Luck" (1942)', *Southerly*, vol.52, no.1, March 1992, pp.33-47.

Ethel Anderson the Intellectual

Ethel Anderson made her first forays into art as the leisured though not wealthy wife of an army official stationed in early twentieth century India. Perhaps it was an earnest desire to do more than just dabble in paint that led the amateur to write to Charles Holmes, a former student with Austin at Eton, at that stage the director of the National Gallery in London. His replies to Ethel's requests for evaluation of her work were both encouraging and constructive. 'I'm not sure that the natives of India have ever been done in the spirit of T. F. Miller', he responded on one occasion, 'I think something of the kind would be delightful and within your power'. However, the novice's attempts to implement the accompanying technical suggestions proved unsuccessful.⁸⁷ As seen, Ethel Anderson preserved this sympathetic link to Britain's art establishment and attempted to use it years later to the advantage of Sydney modernists.

Some time after departing India for England on the outbreak of the First World War, Ethel Anderson became more serious about her artistic endeavours. Life during the first years of the war was for Ethel and her young daughter, Bethia, a rather transient one. Not until Austin's friend the well-known French scholar affectionately if not officially known as 'Professor' Arthur Tilley, and his wife, 'Aunt Margaret', secured a house in the grounds of King's College, Cambridge, did the pair find stability.⁸⁸ There, in the intellectual haven of Cambridge, Ethel found friends, peace and inspiration. The Tilleys were instrumental in introducing her to many Cambridge personalities such as H.G. Wells, and members of the Darwin and Keynes families. Noel Annan has linked the Darwin

⁸⁷ Charles Holmes to Ethel Anderson, 26 March 1915, and 1 April 1915, ELAP, box 6, folder 1, 'Letters 1907-29'.

⁸⁸ Mother and daughter lived in Scarborough and later Suffolk, witnessing bombing raids in both places. They also stayed in Hampshire, Chichester, and numerous other places before moving to Cambridge. See Foott, *Ethel*, pp.89-95.

family with what he termed an 'intellectual aristocracy'. From the early nineteenth century, upper-middle class, professional families drawn together through philanthropy, characterised by tolerance, openness, stability and distaste for spontaneity and superficiality, sharing some new liberal philosophies, and diverging on others, formed complex, ever-expanding networks across Victorian England. By the turn of the century, they displayed a tendency towards staidness and 'even a touch of philistinism' that a younger generation of the intellectual aristocracy, the Bloomsbury Group, was inclined to criticise.⁸⁹ Gwen Raverat, the etcher, and Frances Cornford, the poet, both Darwins by birth, were connected with this expansive and influential network. They were also associated with the Bloomsbury Group, though it seems that Leon Edel counted them only as 'friends of the friends'.⁹⁰ Not long after her arrival in Cambridge, Ethel Anderson crossed paths with Gwen and Frances, the Darwin cousins.

On accepting an invitation 'to join a drawing class at Downing College', Anderson became acquainted with 'the Sorelys and Vulliamys and, of course Mme [Gwen] Raverat (sic)'.⁹¹ According to Bethia her mother also made the acquaintance of 'Frances Coernford [sic]' through the drawing society.⁹² The Cambridge Drawing Society, founded in 1882, held strong links to Downing College, as Phyllis Seward, wife of the Master of Downing College, remained its secretary for seventeen years. It is therefore probable that this is the artistic organisation that invited Ethel Anderson to join its classes. The Society's early meetings were held at Miss Mary C. Greene's studio, where, during the same period, Gwen and Frances Darwin, both granddaughters of the famous Charles Darwin, attended classes. Gwen Darwin joined the Society in 1901, and attended the Slade School in 1908,

⁸⁹ N.G. Annan, 'The Intellectual Aristocracy', in John Harold Plumb (ed.), *Studies in Social History: A Tribute to G.M. Trevelyan*, (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1955), p.252.

⁹⁰ Leon Edel, *Bloomsbury: A House of Lions*, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1979), p.12.

⁹¹ Foott, *Ethel*, p.96.

⁹² Notation on correspondence, Agatha Shore to Ethel Anderson, 1924, ELAP, box 6, folder 1.

where she studied under Henry Tonks and Frederick Brown. The following year she began to teach herself engraving. Shortly afterwards, she married Jacques Raverat, and, over the ensuing years became a 'distinguished wood engraver' and art critic. She remained actively involved in the Drawing Society for over half a century, serving as President for most of the 1930s and 1940s.⁹³ Her cousin, Frances, also received further lessons in art. These were taught by an 'old family friend', Sir William Rothenstein. However, Frances eventually channelled her creative energies into poetry. By 1915, as Frances Cornford, wife of Trinity College scholar of literary classics, Francis Cornford, she had published two books of poems.⁹⁴ It was the Cornfords' son, Christopher, who retained the family's links with the drawing society. Another long-term member of the Cambridge Drawing Society was Edward Vulliamy, 'the East Anglican landscape painter', and 'Keeper of pictures at the Fitzwilliam Museum', one of Cambridge's most imposing cultural institutions.⁹⁵

Gwen, Frances and Jacques, as well as members of the related Keynes family had all belonged to a circle that 'Virginia Woolf in April 1911 dubbed the "neo-pagans"' and others have since called the Bloomsbury Group. The group boasted an intellectual aristocratic pedigree, and centred on the famous and tragic figure of Rupert Brooke whose poetry had inspired Grace Cossington Smith almost a decade before she met Ethel. 'They

⁹³ Anne C. Clay, 'A Picture of the Cambridge Drawing Society', (Cambridge: small Society booklet, no publication details), p.4; David Steel, 'Introduction', in L.M. Newman and D.A. Steel, *Gwen and Jacques Raverat: Paintings and Wood-Engravings, Exhibition and Catalogue*, University of Lancaster Library, 1-23 June 1989; and Reynold Stone (selection and introduction), *The Wood-Engravings of Gwen Raverat*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), p.12.

⁹⁴ Helen Fowler, 'Frances Cornford, 1886-1960' in Shils, E. and Blacker, C. (ed.s), *Cambridge Women: Twelve Portraits*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.139.

⁹⁵ Clay, Cambridge Drawing Society, p.4. Neither Clay, nor the 1914 Cambridge Drawing Society annual exhibition catalogue (only three years – 1912 to 1914 – could be located in the Fitzwilliam Museum Library, Cambridge, and none in the Cambridge Local History Collection. Downing College archivists also failed to uncover records of the Society and its exhibitions) mentioned anyone by the surname of Sorely. See Cambridge Drawing Society, *Catalogue of the Forty-Fourth Exhibition of Pictures of the Cambridge Drawing Society*, 21 February – 1 March 1914.

were “modern”, free-living young people’, rebelling against ‘Victorian stuffiness’. They were also, inevitably, witty, cultivated and intellectual.⁹⁶

There is no doubt that Ethel Anderson’s acquaintance through the Drawing Society with such people proved significant. Echoes of their views concerning art or their own experiments with applications of art resound in her Australian endeavours. Vulliamy, for example, ‘was a true amateur, he believed that drawing and painting cannot be taught, and that it is all-important to remain free from the need to sell pictures’.⁹⁷ Was it coincidence that at about the same time that Anderson and Grace Cossington Smith first met, the quiet modernist consciously decided to keep herself aloof from the artistic mainstream, and, having family support, to pursue her artistic quest without consideration of financial recompense?

While Ethel’s eclectic mind happily stored and savoured the experiences and gossip that such contact afforded, Cornford and Raverat, in particular, helped to open her eyes to a changing artistic world. As the wife of a senior Fellow of Trinity College, and despite tendencies in her poetry that led to her classification as a Georgian, Cornford welcomed the modernist etcher and artist Eric Gill, among others, into her home. The influential British modernist in fact illustrated a 1923 edition of Frances Cornford’s *Autumn Midnight*, and inscribed on the title page ‘to J and GR from FC and EG’. Gill also, with Gwen Raverat, Lucien Pissaro, John Nash and others, founded the Society of Wood Engravers in 1920.⁹⁸ Artistically, Raverat did not follow the modernist path, and ‘she could never quite reconcile herself to abstraction’, but, as a critic during the late 1920s and 1930s, her comments ‘however forthright, [were] not narrow’ and betrayed a love of ‘the

⁹⁶ Steel, *Gwen and Jacques Raverat*, p.16; and Stone, *Wood-engravings of Gwen Raverat*, p.11.

⁹⁷ Clay, *Cambridge Drawing Society*, p.4.

⁹⁸ Fowler, ‘Frances Cornford’, p.145; and Steel, *Gwen and Jacques Raverat*, pp. 18, 20.

Impressionists and Cezanne'.⁹⁹ How much opportunity Ethel had to personally discuss with Raverat such artists and the significant developments in which they had participated is unknown. It is evident however, that Raverat's own artistic forays did have an impact on her. Although never formally trained or experienced in wood-cutting, Anderson felt capable to offer critical advice to Major General Ronald McNicoll another of Austin's close friends, concerning his attempts at the craft.¹⁰⁰ Also, towards the end of the war, Jacques Raverat like Gill, 'became more drawn to religious motifs'. Together, he and Gwen made 'studies' on the walls of the gallery at Newnham Grange, Gwen's childhood home, before they painted a fresco at the Cornford's permanent home, *Conduit Head*.¹⁰¹ It is hardly coincidental that shortly after the end of the war, when the Andersons moved from Cambridge to Worcestershire, Ethel organised and participated in the painting of a number of murals.

When the Andersons were finally reunited in 1921, they took up residence in Low Hill House near the tiny village of White Ladies Aston, Worcestershire. It was while resident at Low Hill House, that Ethel turned the artistic ideas accumulated through her Cambridge experience and correspondence with Charles Holmes, into action. Initially, she visited London for classes in portrait painting, and tested her new skills on Lady Dudley.¹⁰² Not content, she approached the Parochial Church Council in 1923, requesting permission to establish what the Anderson's repeatedly called a 'faculty', with the aim of painting a mural on an interior wall of the village church.¹⁰³ In preparation, she asked Holmes to introduce her to Henry Tonks, a mural expert and one of Raverat's Slade tutors.

⁹⁹ Reynolds, *Wood-engravings of Gwen Raverat*, p.11; and Steel, *Gwen and Jacques Raverat*, p.23.

¹⁰⁰ Ethel Anderson to 'Ron', 'Thursday' [1932], in ELAP, box 13, package 'Letters from Ethel Anderson to Major General Ronald McNichol'.

¹⁰¹ Steel, *Gwen and Jacques Raverat*, p.19.

¹⁰² Austin Anderson, diaries, 6 Nov. 1922; and 2 Feb. 1923, in ELAP, box 28.

Ethel designed the mural, but others assisted, including Alan Clutton-Brock, another Cambridge personality who later contributed articles to the same art journals as Raverat. The resultant scene of five angels beside a stream, set against a backdrop of the Malvern Hills, drew the church council's appreciation and a mention in Arthur Mee's travel guide to Worcestershire.¹⁰⁴

During the same period, Anderson also formed the Young Worcestershire Arts and Crafts Society. Consisting chiefly of her daughter Bethia, and her school friends, it is likely that the society actually served as a source of amusement during the school holidays, rather than as a serious cultural institution. The Society's work included a mural painted in what used to serve as a courtroom when the Anderson's ancient and historic home was used by a series of Bishops before the Civil War as a court of law. Its fanciful combination of a bridge-less Sydney Harbour, New York cityscape, and Boticellian Venus on an English beach 'where parents and visitors could leave their mark' can only be imagined. A visit to Low Hill House recently confirmed that it no longer exists. However, another mural does remain in the attic. A study implementing a flat decorative style clearly influenced by Gauguin, it also depicts Gauguinesque primitives. Symbolising paganism, a scantily clad woman bearing a severed Christ-like head on a rough-hewn tray appears to have attracted a heavenly rescue mission, in the form of angels with gold-leaf halos and large blue or pink, feathered angel-wings. The flat bands of green, purple and blue, overlaid with decorative clusters of frangipanis and other tropical vegetation show clearly the impact of a visit to an exhibition of Gauguin's work in London, made by Ethel

¹⁰³ Foott, *Ethel*, p.110; Minutes, Parochial Church Council (PCC) Meeting, 26 Feb. 1923, 'Minute Book, Vestry, Parish and PCC meetings, 1842-1949', Hereford and Worcester Records Office, Ref. 850 White Ladies Aston BA4779/2, p.85.

¹⁰⁴ Foott, *Ethel*, p.111; PCC, 'Annual Parochial Church meeting, 1924', 30 April 1924, PCC Minutes, p.96; and Arthur Mee (ed), *The King's England*, (London: Hoddes and Stoughton, no copyright, printed 1938). Sadly, winter storms (Bethia Foott guesses some forty years later) have since badly damaged the church wall and destroyed the mural. See Foott, *Ethel*, p.112.

Anderson in 1924. It was perhaps the attic mural which Anderson photographed for Holmes, and concerning which he wrote; 'the strange tropical landscape and trees is in particular a wonderful success'.¹⁰⁵ Thus we see in the Worcester episode the genesis of Ethel Anderson's cultural patronage, the consolidation of her artistic interest in modernism and mural design, and consequently the acquisition of essential prerequisites to Ethel Anderson's success as a patron in Australia.

Armed with the gifts of these experiences – an understanding of the intellectual basis and technical considerations underlying modernist developments, and exposure to cultivated yet modern intellectual minds at the academic heart of the British empire – Ethel Anderson had much to offer the Australian public at a stage in time when the artistic community was itself in a state of flux. Geoffrey Serle, in his survey of Australian art, music, literature, theatre and architecture, *From the Deserts the Prophets Come*, includes a chapter entitled 'Delayed Development c.1900-1930', although he argues that the mid-1920s saw a 'remarkable breakthrough' in the literary scene.¹⁰⁶ Bernard Smith contends that during the 1920s the old men of Australian art, like the priests of Leviticus, laid down the artistic law. They did not do so without public scrutiny. As early as 1922, J. Bruce reasoned that the orthodoxy of Australian art could benefit from allowance for a little imagination, a re-evaluation of acquisition policies and greater exposure to European Masters.¹⁰⁷ Sydney Ure Smith, later in the decade advocating moderate individuality and imagination pointed to the public confusion likely to result from the bitter prejudice on the conservative side of the fence and defensive aggression on the other.¹⁰⁸ On behalf of a confused public, Gavin Long summed up the layman's difficulty. Like pilgrims, Australian artists used to flock to Europe to pay homage to the Old Masters, only to return

¹⁰⁵ C. Holmes to Ethel Anderson, 17 Dec. 1924, in ELAP, box 6, folder 1.

¹⁰⁶ Serle, *From the Deserts*, p.119.

¹⁰⁷ J.F. Bruce, 'The Younger Generation', *AA*, new series, vol.1, no.2, May 1922, pp.45, 46.

to Australia and declare that their nation alone was safe for democracy to develop, and that an entire period of European artistic development, covering the forty years from 1890 to 1930, had little to offer Australia. To Long, the great artistic traditions of the West seemed to culminate, oddly, in the monotonous repetitions of blue and gold Australian landscapes.¹⁰⁹ ‘Delayed development’ may apply to the Sydney art establishment: outside the gallery walls, a storm was beginning to build.

An exhibition of contemporary British art, on show in Sydney during April and May 1933, brought the debate plainly before the public. Over the period of a month, artists and art-lovers sparred and parried with each other in the Letter to the Editor columns of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Some made emotional objections, others hasty defences. Some nit-picked and others reasoned. The most vitriolic outburst belonged to J. S. MacDonald. Others, such as Julian Ashton and NAGNSW trustee, John Sulman, expressed themselves in a more reasonable manner, although they failed to provide careful explanations for the Trustees’ steadfast rejection of the styles exemplified in the exhibition.

Ethel Anderson joined the fray late and only once. Explaining that leaders in the British art world were open to modernism, she linked, once more, the adventurous traits manifest in the exhibited artwork to western artistic tradition. Her contribution did not by any means end the debate. But it demonstrates both the consistency of Ethel Anderson’s application of the learning acquired before her arrival in Australia, and the manner in which she addressed fears voiced by the art establishment. Leslie Rees, speaking about the Lindsays’ and Ashtons’ collective rejection of modernism, explained that they genuinely believed that modernism in art threatened the ‘canons of beauty’ to which they had

¹⁰⁸ Sydney Ure Smith, editorial, *AA*, no.26, Dec. 1928, n.p.

¹⁰⁹ Gavin Long, ‘Layman’s Complaint’, in *AA*, 15 Jan. 1932, pp.20-22.

devoted their lives.¹¹⁰ The critic, James MacDonald spoke about 'big emotions and motives', and 'man's search for truth', while Lionel Lindsay looked to the 'transcendent beauty' of nature.¹¹¹ Anderson's arguments likewise dealt with the immaterial, and the transcendent. Unlike them, she believed that modern art could also convey beauty, nobility or some higher, spiritual dimension, as she demonstrated through her writings on de Maistre, Wakelin and Smith. Modernists could still cherish and act on patriotic, wholesome, or conservative ideals just as the Wall Painters did. Further, her reverence for the Old Masters, well grounded through her Cambridge experience, revealed a common root to their views. Essentially, Anderson did not reject those values and traditions held dear by the gallery's gate-keepers, but she exploited the cultural cringe to render other alternatives particularly those with British institutional or intellectual validation more acceptable. This is why Ethel Anderson was able to play a vital role as a taste-maker. With assurance and informed commentary she allayed the fears linked to modern art by reactionary members of the establishment.

Ethel Anderson did not, of course, single-handedly drag the Sydney art establishment into the mid-twentieth century. Her endeavours coincided with a chaotic mix of intellectual, cultural and political concerns. Helen Topliss considers in further detail the links between modernism and feminism.¹¹² Slowly changing attitudes to women, resulting from decades of increasing educational opportunities and greater sexual and personal freedom, characterised the period. Ethel Anderson, Thea Proctor and Margaret Preston remained vigilant and effective advocates. Many more young women, through

¹¹⁰ Rees, *Small Treasures*, pp.93, 94.

¹¹¹ J.S. MacDonald, annotation on cutting from *New York Times*, notebook, box1, MacDonald Papers, p.27; Notes, MacDonald Papers; and Sydney Ure Smith, draft, 'Heysen and Lindsay', in Smith, Sydney Ure Papers, ML MSS 31, vol. 1, p.231; and Lionel Lindsay, 'The Exhibition of One Hundred and Fifty Years of Australian Art', in *AA*, no.70, 1 March 1938, pp.26.

¹¹² See Helen Topliss, *Modernism and Feminism: Australian Women Artists 1900-1940*, (Sydney: Craftsman House, 1996).

new careers as designers, illustrators, or journalists, and a host of middle class women as magazine readers, collectively ensured a modern aesthetic presence from the early 1920s. Anderson nevertheless possessed a sufficient degree of intelligence, education, uprightness and patriotism, to counter the anti-modernist sentiment shared by Sydney tastemakers and patrons alike, and to make her intellectual authority clear. For this reason, despite her vice-regal links, the consistency of her activities and the intelligence of her arguments did not lend themselves to the dismissive criticisms brought against other women of social influence who sought cultural agency through the support of modern art. By contrast, Lady de Chair may have expressed opinions that favoured modern art, but failed to present well-founded arguments and ultimately to exercise significant cultural agency.

The task of balancing national and imperial loyalties against international influences, old notions of morality against modern freedoms, and womanly independence and professionalism against dependent amateurism is not an exercise unique to the experience of Ethel Anderson and her pro-modernist collaborators. Charity and literary women in their own ways also juggled a series of traditional and modern forces, where the traditional includes mid-Victorian conceptions of femininity and morality as well as class and cultural elitism, and the modern denotes the changing condition of womanhood, and the advancement of commerce and technology. Neither forward nor backward tendencies worked consistently for or against the women culturists. This is evident also in the case of religious women, whose commitment to a church, sect or order both aided and hindered their ability to act as cultural agents. The example of Lilian Frost, the long-serving Pitt Street Congregational Church organist demonstrates this ambivalent duality. It is her story that we must now consider.



Top left: Bethia and Ethel, photo from Fairfax, reproduced in Drusilla Modjeska, *Stravinski's Lunch*, p.269.

Below right and below left: Ethel Anderson and Austin Anderson, respectively, *B.P. Magazine*, June 1931, p.39.

Mrs. A. T. Anderson, of Ball Green, Turramurra. Mrs. Anderson, in addition to her many social duties, takes an active interest in art.



Photo: E. O. Hoppe.



Brigadier-General A. T. Anderson, C.M.G., private secretary to His Excellency the Governor of New South Wales, Sir Philip Game. General Anderson commanded the Artillery of the 62nd Division of the Imperial Army in France. Arriving from India in September, 1914, he was on active service throughout the Great War (once wounded). He returned to England from Germany in 1919 from the army of occupation.

Photo: Rene Pardon.



Lady de Chair with Lieutenant Graham de Chair, A.D.C., R.N., and Miss Elaine de Chair.



MISS ELAINE de CHAIR.

Screen designed and worked by Lady de Chair.



Miss Valerie Bavin, eldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. T. R. Bavin, of Darling Point, and a grand-daughter of the late Hon. F. E. Winchcombe and Mrs. Winchcombe, of Bowral and Darling Point.
Photo. by Bernice Agar.

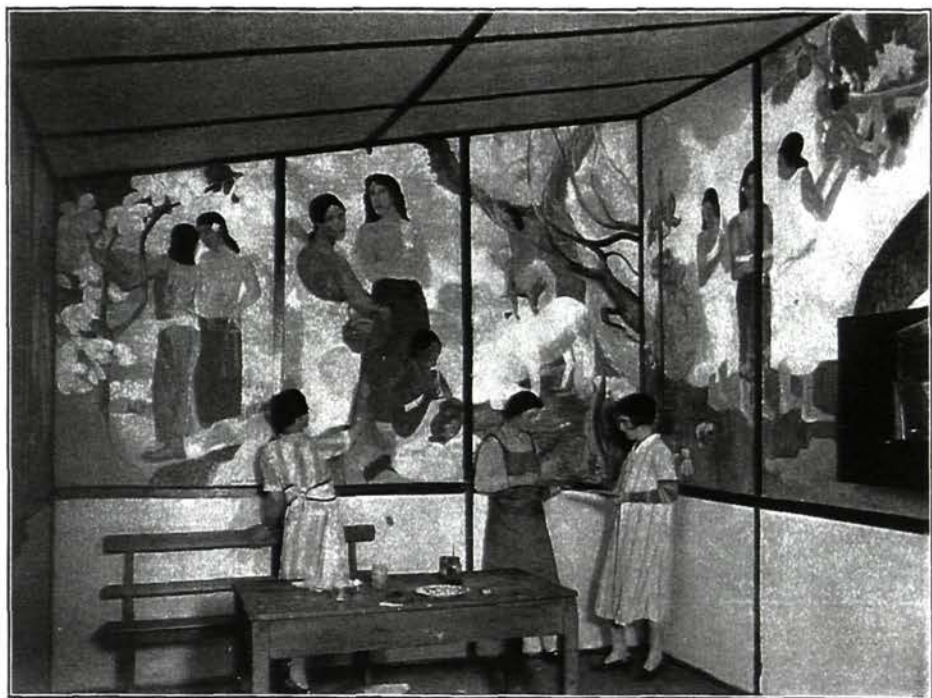
Top left: Lady (Enid) de Chair, Graham de Chair, and Elaine de Chair, *The Wentworth Magazine*, Dec. 1929, p.7.

Top right: Elaine de Chair posing in front of screen worked by Lady de Chair with ribbon and pieces of fabric collected from women around the country, *The Wentworth Magazine*, Dec. 1929, p.7.

Bottom left: Valerie Bavin, *Society*, Sept. 1922, p.20.

Mrs. Eric Campbell, Miss Bethia Anderson, and Miss Jean Ramsay add the finishing touches to panels portraying scenes of barbaric life. The panel on the extreme left of the picture is the work of Miss Marian Russell.

These panels are treated in a flat, decorative manner, after the style of Gauguin. Strictly speaking, mural paintings should follow this convention rather than aim at an effect of perspective or natural view.



Mrs. Anderson's aim is to get together a group of young people who work happily in company at decorating, find heaps of fun in actual work. She hopes to create a properly trained body of amateurs who will supply materials, and carry free, any work that wanted in a good cause. The Wall Painters are working at present on a series of posters for forthcoming play in of charity.

This page: The Turrumurra Wallpainters at work in the stables at the Andersons' home, Ball Green, Turrumurra. 'The Mural Painters of Turrumurra Showing How the Younger Set, Decoratively Speaking, Have gone to the Wall', *The Home*, Nov. 1927, pp.22-23.



Miss Elaine de Chair is principally responsible for the picture on the left. The panel on the right is the work of Miss Grace Cassington Smith, who is the only professional painter among this group of girls. She will hold an exhibition of her work early next year.



(Above): Mrs. Eric Campbell, Miss Betty Lindner, and Mrs. Badham-Jackson each at work on her own idea of how to treat a wall in a decorative manner. The panel above the window is the work of Miss Pat Alexander.



(On the Left): Miss Elaine de Chair gives free play to her fancy in this lively representation of Saint George and the dragon. Lady de Chair has painted an interesting panel also



Top and bottom left: Mural in attic of Low Hill House, near White Ladies' Aston, Worcestershire, England, taken 11 September 1998.

Bottom right: Mural inside Saxon Church, White Ladies' Aston, reproduced from Bethia Anderson, 'Portraits of an English Village', in *B.P. Magazine*, March 1931, p.49.



Saxon Church of White Ladies Aston. The interior view shows recent mural decoration by Ethel Anderson (Mrs. A. T. Anderson), painted prior to her departure for Australia.

This page: 'The Children's Chapel', St James' 1824-1999, (Sydney: published by the Churchwardens of St James' Church Sydney to mark the 175th anniversary of the consecration of the church), pp.42-43.



The Children's Chapel

The painting of the Chapel of St Mary and the Angels, or Children's Chapel in the crypt was a collaborative venture by several artists. The theme was the traditional Christmas carol *How three ships* but the setting was contemporary, Sydney Harbour in 1929 and the iconography Australian, and personal, with both saints and children modelled on friends. Restored by Ethel Anderson in 1952, forty years later the wall paintings had deteriorated to such an extent that the Chapel had to be closed. They were restored in 1993. The work involved the complete removal of the paintings from the walls and remounting on a fibre glass shell.

INTERNATIONAL CONSERVATION SERVICES

Artists Gwen Ramsay, Bethia Foott and Jean Ramsay flanked by a moustached St John and the Angel of Mercy, with cockatoo, to design by Ethel Anderson.



Christmas 1998

A play about angels taking the star to Bethlehem formed a part of the Children's Christmas service on Christmas Eve. Some of the angels were 'learners'.

(Back cover) The Great Easter Vigil 1985

The congregation faces towards the centre of the church for the Gospel reading. Candles represent new light in the risen Christ. Christ is Risen. He is risen indeed.