

clem forbes | image-maker



bettina macaulay

Forbes

clem forbes | **image-maker**

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Front Cover:

Children Playing 1996

pastel on paper

43.0 x 63.0 cm

Collection of Dorothy Forbes

Photograph by Ann Fitzgerald

Back Cover:

[House in cane field] 1976

oil on composition board

57.0 x 89.0 cm

Private Collection

Photograph by Carl Warner

Inside cover:

Forbes signature from Bicentennial Mural,
Mackay Entertainment Centre

Photograph by Bettina MacAulay

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An Artspace Mackay Exhibition

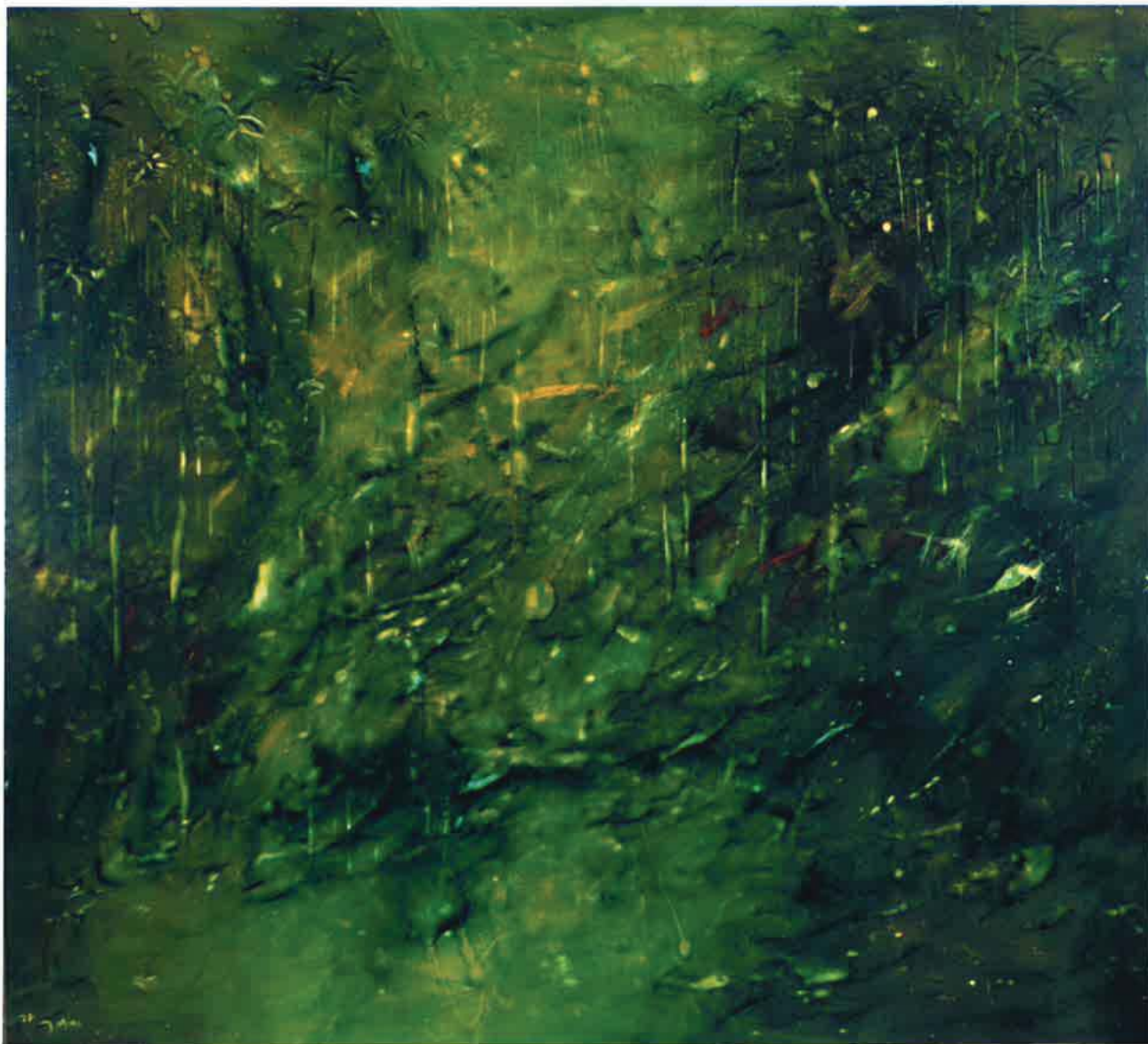
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Rainforest 1978
oil on composition board
121.0 x 133.0 cm
Collection of Artspace Mackay,
Mackay City Council
Gift of the Queensland Arts Council, Mackay Branch 1980

foreword

As a gesture towards the establishment of a regional art gallery collection, the Mackay Branch of the Queensland Arts Council, in association with a group of interested persons, presents a major painting by Clem Forbes to the custody of the Mackay City Council, until such time as a gallery is established, when the work will be hung in that collection.

24 June 1980

When a group of Mackay citizens wanted to donate a work of art to the Mackay City Council in 1980 they didn't have to look very far. The logical choice of an artist for such a work to represent their hopes and aspirations for the future cultural life of the city was Clem Forbes. Consequently his work *Rainforest* (1978) was purchased and donated to Council with the hope of encouraging the development of a regional art gallery. At the time Clem Forbes could have been considered the main driving force behind the visual arts in the city of Mackay. Clem was exhibiting his work, teaching students several days a week and educating the community about the visual arts through his commercial gallery. A seemingly tireless advocate of the importance of a regional community having a vibrant and stimulating cultural life, he also supported theatrical and musical groups.

For the past 24 years *Rainforest* has been displayed outside the room where Councillors meet, and where the decisions were made that led to the eventual opening of Artspace Mackay in 2002, sadly, some years after the artist had passed away. His

legacy to the Mackay community is prominent in the substantial mural he created in the Foyer of the Mackay Entertainment Centre, and through his work that continues to have pride of place within public, private and corporate collections throughout the region. A notable part of Clem's legacy is the passion for the arts that he stimulated among his many students, collectors and friends who live here.

During Clem's life there was no regional gallery in Mackay to exhibit his work, to assist with reaching a broader audience and to create awareness of his work outside the region. When he passed away in 1997 his friends assembled an exhibition of his work that was displayed at the Mackay Entertainment Centre, and the Regional Arts Development Fund supported a research project to document a large number of his works and their location within the community. These projects laid some of the groundwork for the development of this retrospective.

Clem Forbes: Image-Maker is a major exhibition developed by Artspace Mackay to show Clem's work within the context of a public gallery. The exhibition draws together works from throughout his career and from a number of sources such as public, corporate and private collections including those in regional gallery and university collections throughout Queensland that haven't been seen in Mackay for many years. The exhibition has been curated by Bettina MacAulay, who has conducted extensive interviews

the artist speaks

(On painting in oils): *The oil pictures...express the wet, shiny dampness.*

The artist, writing in 1989



Scribble gum trunks,
Stradbroke Island 1976
air-brush on paper
100.0 x 62.0 cm



Houses by the sea 1971
synthetic polymer paint on
composition board
62.0 x 85.0 cm
Collection of Artspace Mackay,
Mackay City Council
Gift of the Mackay Club

with the artist's family, friends, students, collectors and fellow artists. These have been used to piece together a comprehensive portrait of Clem Forbes both as an artist and as a person for this publication. This co-operative effort has enabled Artspace Mackay to present an exhibition that puts his artistic output into fresh perspective.

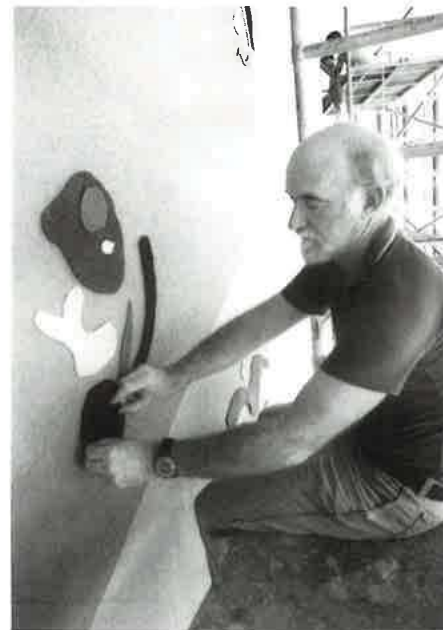
Artspace Mackay would like to thank Dorothy Forbes and her family for their support in making this exhibition possible, and everyone who participated in interviews with the curator and gave their time and effort to facilitate the exhibition, particularly the group which began the Clem Forbes Documentation Project in 1998. We would especially like to thank all the lenders of works, many of which have pride of place in people's homes or business premises. While their absence for the duration of the exhibition may be keenly felt, it is this act of generosity that will make it possible for many other people to enjoy this retrospective.

The generosity of the exhibition's major sponsor, Alman Financial Planning, has enabled Artspace Mackay to develop this affordable publication and a comprehensive public program to accompany the exhibition. Sponsorship from Earth Sea Pottery, ABC Tropical North, and Channel 7 Mackay, has also greatly assisted the presentation of this exhibition.

Artspace Mackay is operated by Mackay City Council and the exhibition **Clem Forbes: Image-Maker** is the main visual

arts event of the 2004 Mackay Festival of Arts, the largest regional arts festival in Queensland, which will mean that many people will see this exhibition. Mackay is a fast growing regional centre and a large number of the people who see this exhibition may not have the depth of knowledge of Clem Forbes's work that long term residents of Mackay have. It should give them a fresh insight into why he will always have a special place in the hearts of the Mackay community as an artist who drew his inspiration from the place where we live.

Robert Heather
Director
Artspace Mackay



*Clem Forbes at Work
on his Bicentennial mural
Mackay Entertainment Centre
Photograph by Daryl Wright*



*Self portrait 1960
oil on canvas
30.0 x 29.5 cm
Collection of Dorothy Forbes*



Forest and parrots 1984
mixed media on card
78.0 x 98.0 cm
Collection of Sanders Turner Ellick Architects Pty Ltd, Mackay

curator's acknowledgments

This retrospective is a tribute to the memory of Clem Forbes, from a community in which he was so long a driving force. In researching the artist's life and work, I was assisted by many people and it is their generosity and help which have made this catalogue and the retrospective it accompanies possible.

Firstly, I would like to thank Robert Heather and the team at Artspace Mackay, Nicholas Williams, Tracey Heathwood, Sue Anderson, Alicia Gibson, Pam Brooks, Leon Just, Skye Rettke and the volunteers, for their commitment to the project. I am indebted to owners of works for making them available to me for study and listing in the Artspace Clem Forbes Database. I should particularly like to thank those who lent works for the exhibition. Clem Forbes was prolific and to include all I would have wished, would probably make three or four exhibitions.

Particular thanks are due to the Forbes family, especially Mrs. Dorothy Forbes, who was co-founder and director, with Clem Forbes, of the Bakehouse Art Gallery. I wish also to thank Clem and Dorothy's daughter Sophia. Dorothy and Sophie went to a great deal of trouble locating documents and photographs which were critical to my research, as well as allowing me access to artworks in their care.

I thank too Dr. James Forbes, Clem's elder brother, and Mrs. Cherie Forbes for their patience in answering my many questions on family detail. I am especially indebted to Dr. David Cilento, Clem Forbes's brother-

in-law and probably the artist's oldest and closest friend. David's insights into Clem's work have been invaluable.

In 1998 I began a development project on the artworks of Clem Forbes. This was instigated by a group of Mackay art lovers who raised funds to document artworks: Lorraine Gray-McConnell and Simon McConnell, Margaret and Philip Lane, Denise Neville, Lesley Kane, Edith Forsyth, Roslyn Jones, Helen Tyzack, and Rick Wood. I am especially indebted to Lorraine and Margaret for sharing their knowledge of the artist's life and work over a long period.

I am grateful to collectors and former students of Clem Forbes who spoke to me or referred me to others about the project, and I offer my special thanks to the following who agreed to be interviewed and share their memories of the artist, exhibitions, art classes, summer schools, and workshops. I thank also Sue Anderson, who recorded and transcribed the interviews, Raye Williams and Lesley Kane for cuttings, catalogues, notes and photographs of the artist, and Lyn Ahmat, Kay Bampton, Cathryn Bishop, Dr. David Blakeley, Cecilie Bolton, Dr. Warren Brooks, Helen Broadhurst, Bob and Julie Brock, Carol Burns, Roger Cameron, Anne Chamberlain, Eileen Cilento, Irene Coburn, Carmel Daveson, Sandra Fletcher, Leneen Forde AC, Pauline Hendry, Don Heron, Cathy Knezevic, Victor Mace, Margaret and Jim McLennan, Laurence Manning, Ralph Martin, Cilla Martland, Chris Nice, Gordon Noscov, Michelle O'Hara, John

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Many other people helped in diverse ways. I should like to thank especially: Helen Cole at James Hardie Library of Australian Fine Arts (State Library of Queensland), Judy Gunning and Amanda Gardner (Queensland Art Gallery Library) and Glenn R. Cooke, Research Curator, Queensland Heritage, Queensland Art Gallery. Lastly, I especially thank Desmond MacAulay for his unfailing support and assistance, for his suggestions and for sharing his insights into the work of Clem Forbes.

Bettina MacAulay



Leneen Forde 1963
oil on canvas
94.5 x 78.0 cm
Collection of Leneen Forde AC
Commissioned by Francis Gerard Forde

clem forbes | image-maker

a life in outline

Clem Forbes was the third child of hoteliers Tom and Mary (Mollie) Forbes, and spent his infancy and early childhood at Merinda, a hot abattoir town near Bowen where, he later recalled, life was very depressing.¹ For much of that time his father Tom was absent, serving in the army in World War II. Clem's mother, a resourceful woman who had, between the World Wars, performed with her brother Jim in his band on Pacific cruise ships, refused to send the children away, and ran the local hotel in her husband's absence. At the time she had three children (another boy died aged two weeks and there was a stillbirth and several miscarriages). Every Sunday after Mass at the little Merinda church, the family went to the cemetery and knelt and prayed in the oppressive heat around the graves of the babies, other relations and Mollie's brother Jim, who had died from tuberculosis. Several of the artist's works from the early 1990s are oblique references to the Merinda experience. He spoke of two 1992 still life pastels as 'taking him to another place'.²

After the war, during travels with his parents, Clem saw some of coastal and inland Queensland and Brisbane, and about 1947 the future artist first saw the Great Barrier Reef. In 1948 Tom and Mollie leased the Esk Hotel and Mollie, who had, like her children, been brought up in hotels that kept up a tradition of white linen and silver, determined that she would maintain that standard in all the hotels the Forbes subsequently managed. In Esk a woman Shire Councillor fostered the boy's interest in drawing and painting. He remembered

a beautiful little town and rainforest mountain as 'heaven'. At Esk in 1951, Clem decided he wanted to paint after seeing Dobell's painting *The Cypriot*, exhibited in the Queensland Art Gallery's touring Art Train.

When the Forbes left Esk to lease a hotel in Eumundi, Clem abandoned his studies at the Marist Brothers School at Ashgrove in Brisbane and, aged about 14 or 15, worked briefly at the hotel and helped his father with catering at various race meetings. A Forbes painting from 1971, *Bookmaker and his wife*, which may refer obliquely to his parents, owes something both to Dobell and the artist's experiences at race tracks. Tom Forbes secured his son a printing apprenticeship at the *Nambour Chronicle*. About that time, Clem took up the study of watercolour painting with an elderly Edinburgh-born artist, Philip Samuels (possibly a member of an art society in Scotland), at Eumundi, who also produced sculpture and stained glass.³

At the age of about 16, Clem Forbes was found to have tuberculosis and was admitted to the South Brisbane Auxiliary Hospital, which he described as 'the worst prison'.⁴ While there he avidly studied Max Meldrum's tonal theory.⁵ He was discharged in 1956 (when TB patients were still dying) and convalesced with his parents at Stradbroke Island in Moreton Bay. There, at Amity Point (on the island's Bay side), Clem's parents had bought Elkhorn Lodge, a group of fishing cabins.



Dorothy c1975
air-brush on paper
64.0 x 51.7 cm
Collection of Dorothy Forbes



Sophia c1975
air-brush on paper
64.0 x 51.7 cm
Collection of Dorothy Forbes



Brigalow country 1979
oil on canvas
91.0 x 121.5 cm

Clem, the future conservationist, gradually regained his health, working hard physically clearing trees and beginning a serious study of watercolour, employing images of Amity, and nearby sandy beaches, swamps and banksia forests. In 1956, well past the usual age for obtaining an apprenticeship, Clem was accepted as an apprentice dental technician by Bevy (Beverly) Barnes, a Brisbane dentist who (with his wife Rae) had been in hospital with Clem. They encouraged his interest in art, and may have assisted him in securing a number of the portrait commissions he undertook in the early 1960s. On completing his apprenticeship Clem continued painting, buying art books, for a time attending the Brisbane Central Technical College at night, regularly reading art books at a Brisbane library, and visiting exhibitions at the Queensland Art Gallery, the Johnstone Gallery and the Moreton Galleries.

Clem Forbes moved to Collinsville in 1961. He later met Dorothy McGuinness, a Brisbane artist, and in 1964 they married and went to Mackay, where Clem opened a dental laboratory. In North Queensland, Clem Forbes continued to paint part-time, not becoming a full-time artist until 1975. He drew on both his earlier visual experiences—of bush landscape, creeks, horse paddocks and picnic races—and progressively on his new environments of brigalow, diverse earthforms, the changing landscape, the Clermont flood, mining towns, cane farms and cane fields, flora, fauna and avian life, country and town architecture, rainforests, reef and islands,

the artist speaks

My artistic thought is conveyed through the placement of objects in my paintings.

September 1971 news report on the artist's first exhibition in Mackay, at the Hotel Whitsunday



Fire in the brigalow 1979
oil on composition board
90.0 x 90.0 cm



[Brigalow with lake] 1979
watercolour on paper
25.0 x 72.0 cm



Burning brigalow triptych 1973
oil on composition board
106.8 x 252.3 cm
(each panel 106.8 x 84.1 cm)

marine life, artistic and cultural life, and other themes. Stanislaus Rapotec, a significant artist visiting Mackay in 1971, saw his work and took some examples to Sydney, recommending him also to galleries in Melbourne and Perth. At Rapotec's suggestion, he exhibited his work in 1971 at Mackay's Hotel Whitsunday, at a time when North Queensland lacked galleries.

In May 1972, Clem and Dorothy Forbes opened the Bakehouse Art Gallery in Victoria Street, Mackay, introducing a venue where the work of notable Australian artists could be exhibited, and one where Clem could show his own work and make his own evaluations of its merits against the works of important Australian contemporary painters.⁶ In 1978 the Bakehouse closed and the Forbes Studio Gallery opened in George Street, Mackay.

This Catalogue and its appended lists continue the narrative of Forbes's later career, through interviews, a variety of assessments of his works and themes, and material gathered from the artist's friends, students, collectors, artists, and galleries—and (posthumously) from the artist himself.

CLEMENTS PATRICK FORBES was born in Bowen on 28 January 1938, and died in Brisbane on 8 July 1997, aged 59. His funeral was held at North Stradbroke Island.



Rainforest, Falls Creek 1975
synthetic polymer paint on
composition board
86.0 x 94.0 cm

Queensland University of Technology Art Collection, Brisbane



Brigalow landscape 1973
oil on composition board
62.5 x 93.0 cm



Rainforest mist [Rainforest Canopy] 1977
oil on composition board
86.0 x 91.0 cm



Bright forest 1984
synthetic polymer paint on
composition board
108.5 x 159.0 cm

Perc Tucker Regional Gallery Collection, Townsville



Ti- tree swamp (in the wet) c1974
synthetic polymer paint on paper
101.7 x 64.0 cm



Ti- tree swamp (in the dry) c1974
synthetic polymer paint on paper
101.7 x 64.0 cm

image, maker, | image-maker

Clem Forbes came habitually to describe himself as an 'image-maker', at a time when its present connotations in such realms as the quasi-political, film and entertainment, and the Internet were unknown. About the time that he was carving out his early artistic career, the terms 'image-maker' and 'image-making' were, however, beginning to undergo a sea change. Earlier artistic and theoretical ideas about representation (re-presentation, thus reclaiming the absent scene or person), 'truth' and the 'real' were shifting ground and becoming elusive. This development was also making room for 'image-maker' to encompass more pejorative meanings—such as the agent or purveyor of political 'spin'. Whereas half a millennium before, when it entered the English language, the term 'image-maker' was applied to sculptors, carvers and makers of statuary, by the 1960s and 1970s, both the media of image-making and perceptions of imaginative possibilities applied to image-making were changing. And increasingly, image-making resumed its regularly recurring experience as a site for academic and philosophical argument and debate.

Clem Forbes was, however, a practical man, a 'maker' or 'makar' in the older senses. Painting, he wrote in a 1984 statement, is a collection of many forms of endeavour—craft, trade, intellect and emotion:

It plunders [the artist's] ego, his science, his knowledge of history and religion, his spiritual and emotional self. Through these he invades other cultures...in an effort to

reach a...universalart. ...The artist uses ...symbols to convey meaning...[that is] usually complex.

In the pre-Reef and Lent paintings, he explored ideas drawn from Russian icons, the stained glass of Chartres Cathedral, medieval woodcarving, and Japanese wood blocks.

The constant direction in Forbes's work was the timeless, and placing high value on the impulse to make images that were not meretricious, but held to exploratory ideas of people and their environments, to a search for inner meaning, and to universal aspirations of the human condition. Art, says his brother Dr. James Forbes, was 'the passion of Clem's life'.⁷

Scope of exhibition

Many works were inspected during the planning for this exhibition. Those chosen reveal the central thrust of the artist's ideas and concerns in developing his major themes, but it has not been possible to include all significant examples of the work of this prolific painter. Some sub-themes had to be omitted and a few works are presented where their inclusion usefully extends a coherent frame of reference for the wider exhibition. The works on display reveal both the artist's practices over time, and indicative allusions to inner and personal issues. They range in date from a 1959 self-portrait to a colourful but brooding pastel of the Glass House Mountains painted in 1996, the year before his death. The majority of works were

selected from the period 1975-1991, when Forbes was aged between 37 and 53, though representative works from the artist's earlier and late periods are included.



Ti-Tree Swamp, Slade Point 2003
Photograph by Simon McConnell



Strangler fig 1975
oil on composition board
121.0 x 91.0 cm
Collection of Canegrowers, Mackay District

clem forbes | contribution to art in mackay

Forbes and the origins of Artspace

Clem Forbes was asked, in a 1993 interview, for his views on the establishment of a regional art gallery in Mackay. He said:

I feel that there is something that needs to be quite clear to the community right from the start. Such a gallery would be an art museum and any acquisitions for it would need to come from a very high level. There should also be commercial galleries to cater for the various levels of art in the community. An art museum should not be looked to as a place for everybody to exhibit and sell. It should be quite separate and held to a very high standard.⁸

Forbes wanted a regional gallery to be established in Mackay and, as Gordon Noscov recalls, Forbes was involved in early debates that, after wide discussions, over several years, eventually resulted in the opening of Artspace.⁹

Clem understood the need to look beyond a small group, and encourage established and well-known artists to visit and support the concept of a public gallery in the city. It was agreed that a prestigious public space would be complemented by smaller spaces, such as the Mackay Art Society's exhibiting venue, and workshop areas. (The Mackay Art Society was established nearly forty years ago, and is one of the city's oldest cultural groups.) Forbes's friends and students took up the challenge of agitating and planning for a public gallery.¹⁰

Artist and community

As man and artist, Clem Forbes attracted strong and at times contradictory passions. But while his supporters and critics could hold robust views, there was a consensus in the wider community: Clem Forbes was a positive force to be reckoned with in the cultural and artistic history and development of Mackay and, in several respects, the wider region of North Queensland. The commonly held view in the State's northern regions is that he made a real difference to the cultural life of the North, inspiring in many a genuine interest in art. He opened possibilities and fostered constructive changes in community views.

A powerfully recurring theme that emerged in researching this Catalogue was the inspirational nature of Forbes's practice and teaching roles—a characteristic that individuals continue to feel in their lives: 'That was his big strength, his ability to inspire people'.¹¹ He became the nucleus for many groups, an exemplar who generated an interest in discovering art and its history. Importantly, he 'naturalised' the Mackay environment, teaching people to see the greens and other colours of the local region.¹² On the Bakehouse Art Gallery's fourth anniversary Mackay architects Larry Sanders and Phillip Ellick described it as giving 'atmosphere to the town...[it's] one of the few old-style structures which has been used to great effect in Mackay'.

The artist Tom Risley met Forbes in 1977. 'He was a man to admire,' Risley said.

'He was a mentor in the true sense, who could articulate things very well.'¹³ Giving effect to Forbes's energetic presence was his following of students and collectors—overlapping groups that were ready to support his work, were encouraged to open their eyes and minds to art, and who looked forward to his exhibitions.¹⁴ One of Forbes's students who felt the importance of Forbes's educative role in Mackay said it introduced an artistic quality previously unavailable in the local community. She also noted—as did other students—the conjunction of thought and sensitivity with strength of colour and line in his works.¹⁵ Another student found him 'very patient, kind and respectful. I admired his sense of personal boundaries. He often said women were better students than men, because they were more receptive'.¹⁶



Strangler fig 1976
air-brush on paper
63.5 x 51.0 cm



Rainforest pool and parrots 1981
pastel on paper
53.0 x 72.0 cm

A number of people who knew Forbes well speak of him as being shy, introverted and a very private person, one who was not easy to talk to, could be irascible and outspoken, and did not appear particularly well organised. Yet some of his students found that his ability to gain and focus their attention helped them achieve lasting self-discipline. Others pointed to Forbes's remarkable concentration on the important lessons of art as having its own disciplinary weight. This focus, his professed lack of interest in the minutiae of art politics, his need for artistic recognition, and a certain propensity for argument, meant that a level of agitation sometimes surrounded him. This energy was often translated in his teaching to novel and absorbing artistic exercises, and in his work to renewed vigour in pursuing artistic goals. The artist's apparently contradictory nature (a human trait, surely) could produce work that evoked the experience of many more famous forebears in art. As one student said: 'Clem's paintings seem to me to be relaxed and about floating, very calm and almost dreamlike. I think his impact is huge and is still happening, and this exhibition is part of it. His works are timeless'.¹⁷



Lorikeets 1990
pastel on paper
37.0 x 26.0 cm

Collection of St Patrick's College, Mackay

the artist speaks

I paint for the love of painting itself.
September 1971 news report on the artist's first
exhibition in Mackay, at the Hotel Whitsunday

*I am not striving for a likeness. I am
trying to convey an idea associated
with the country.*
1994 News report



Rainforest lorikeets 1985
pastel on paper
47.0 x 62.0 cm



Clowning lorikeets 1980
pastel on paper
36.0 x 35.6 cm



[*Stained glass painting*] 1994-5
pastel on paper
68.0 x 97.0 cm

influences

Artists' ideas come from many sources. Students of Clem Forbes believe that some of his works reflect particular autobiographical events. One of the most important resources for visual artists, though, is the study of art and artists. Whole libraries have been written on such topics as 'fancy', 'imagination', 'originality', and what distinguishes the creative work of a particular painter, sculptor, writer or musician. Many visual artists have a 'look' that we recognise, that sets them apart from others. Every artist is somehow affected by his or her visual memory of other artists, whether consciously or not, and whether contemporary or from earlier periods. The challenge always is to produce one's own images with careful thought, coherence and integrity. Clem Forbes discussed the issue in a video of his Bicentennial mural at the Mackay Entertainment Centre:

It's unfortunate when you make things...that you find things similar to what a lot of other people have made. Here it looks like Matisse and Miro. Different people have wound up with these kinds of shapes. ...Combinations of shapes remind you of shapes there that Paul Klee made. But even though you recognise them you can either leave them there or alter them, when you discover sometimes forms or shapes other people have used. I don't worry too much about it.

Forbes's students recall that, encouraging them to research and explore, he spoke continually about other artists and their approaches. Among the many he mentioned to them were Donald Friend, Sidney Nolan, Russell Drysdale, Albert

Tucker, Arthur Boyd, William Robinson, Sam Fullbrook, and Gil Jamieson (whose use of colour seems to have changed Forbes's ideas). Several interviewees acknowledged that he was widely aware of the work of many artists.²³ Forbes studied the work of Australian and international artists, along a lengthy historical timeframe. Other Australian artists whose work he studied included Tom Roberts, Max Meldrum, William Dobell, the Boyds, Eric Westbrook, John Perceval and Fred Williams.²⁴ He met a number of other Australian artists, including Stanislaus Rapotec, Pro Hart, John Rigby, Ian Fairweather (whom he visited), Tom Risley, Arthur Evan Read and Robert Dickerson, developing friendships with several.²⁵ Forbes also studied the work of Piero della Francesca, Utamaro, Goya, Gericault, Constable, Turner, Corot, Wyeth, Gauguin, Bonnard, Matisse, Van Gogh, Picasso, Miro and Klee. Clem Forbes's largely inspirational influence on his students, whom he encouraged to find their own artistic paths, also led to some of them subsequently becoming artistic influences on others.

the artist speaks

I use pastel to express the colours [of the tropical environment].

The artist, writing in 1989



[Reclining nudes] 1979
charcoal on three sheets of paper
59.5 x 62.5 cm (overall)



Girl reading c1981
charcoal on paper
74.5 x 54.0 cm



Stained glass suite
(two of three pairs of door panels) 1985
Manufactured by Wayne Caldwell, Mackay
leaded coloured Italian and French glass

I [*Queensland houses, Ulysses butterfly, fish*]
123.5 x 20.0 cm (each panel)

II [*Eungella [turtles in water, sun, moon, kingfisher]*]
119.0 x 32.3 cm (each panel)

the artist's themes

In Clem Forbes's oeuvre, there is an undercurrent in its several themes:

*In his works I see solitude and sadness, but also it's always searching. I find his prints are like that—there's solitude and sadness I think, a depth of sadness. In his paintings there is just complete stillness...the colour and the vibrancy in the fish series and the pastels produce powerful, moving works, but there are others that are just still—it's as though he has painted a second work on the day, and this is what he witnessed.*²⁶

Clem Forbes noted, in an exhibition statement in 1989, that he had once thought he would replace his tropical images of 'birds and rainforest, blue-green seas, dreamy nights, fiery sunsets, and lazy endings to the hot day'. In fact, these themes became ever more marked during his later career.

Environment: Land and Sky

Many of Forbes's friends and students recall him as very 'down to earth', and showing a deep resolve over environmental issues.²⁷ In the early 1960s, Forbes painted watercolours of Amity Point and Stradbroke Island, and then executed an early series of environmental works in North Queensland, from Mackay to Rockhampton, observing brigalow clearing and burning, cattle, dams, bottle trees, and ringbarked trees. About 1967, Forbes spoke publicly about his consciousness of conservation issues, and being appalled by the slaughter of kangaroos and other wildlife and the possibility of oil drilling on the Great Barrier Reef.²⁸

the artist speaks

My imagery borders on realism, but realism as a symbol rather than the depiction of the used subject. ...Painting is a form of writing.

Clem Forbes, artist's statement, 1984



The last part of the day 1985

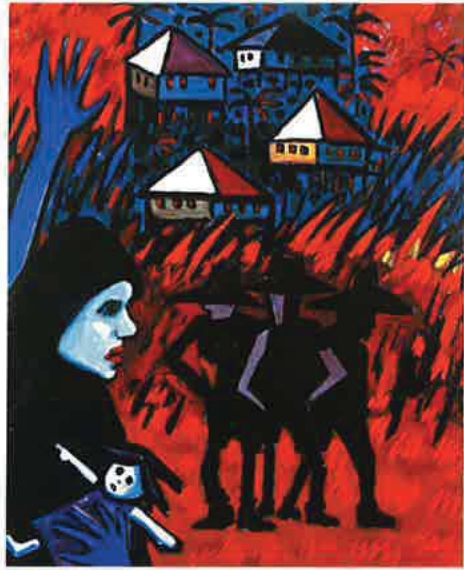
pastel on paper
53.0 x 72.0 cm

Commissioned by James Cook University (book cover design)
Collection of Dorothy Forbes



Bay at night 1984

synthetic polymer paint on paper
51.0 x 64.0 cm



Woman of the cane fields 1-4 1991
oil on composition board
142.5 x 119.6 cm (each panel)
Collection of Central Queensland University, Mackay campus

Brigalow and rural life: The artist's early Northern images depict the bottle tree, the cattle dam and the brigalow country. As well as the early brigalow paintings in red and browns, Clem painted the brigalow in soft pastel colours—early morning, evening, in oil, gouache and watercolour. Ralph Martin recalls challenging Clem's interpretation in his pink brigalow paintings, and after discussion with Clem, seeing how a certain brigalow landscape with its underlying red soil was dramatically infused with a pink glow in late afternoon. Many of Clem's students were attracted to the 'brooding darkness' of his brigalow and rural town paintings.²⁹ The well-known Brisbane artist and former Queensland Art Gallery Trustee John Rigby, who exchanged works with Forbes and has two of his brigalow paintings, regards Forbes as a good artist, and one who was a little neglected by the art world.³⁰

Rainforest: The rainforest, with its wet, lush greens, its birds and its towns, has been a major theme, contrasting in the artist's eye with his visual memories of Bowen and Merinda.³¹ He wrote, in a statement from 1989, after painting the rainforest for sixteen years, that he felt he had 'just begun'.

The rainforest paintings were gradually populated with lorikeets, Ulysses butterflies, kingfishers, rainforest fish in pools, houses on slopes within the forest, and later the enveloping mist. The transforming in the late works of lorikeets into aeroplanes is a distancing effect, with surrealistic overtones and spiritual connotations.

Birds and butterflies: In a published interview, Clem Forbes spoke about how birds came into his paintings:

*In my early pictures there were no birds or animals. When I first came to North Queensland in 1964 there were hardly any birds to be seen in or around Mackay. ...Now the birds have returned and several years ago I began putting them into the pictures.*³²

As he began painting the rainforest with its greens, a student recalls Clem saying it 'needed colour', and colour came from 'the splash of the parrots and butterflies'.³³

Cane farms and cane fields: A recurring subject in Forbes's output is the cane fields, beginning in the mid-1970s with a focus on the cane farmer's house surrounded by green fields of cane extending in all directions. In 1991 Forbes began painting a dramatically-keyed series showing the isolated lives of cane farmers' wives. The women often appear silhouetted against burning cane, and the artist developed the series as a commentary on 'women's emotional and physical needs'.³⁴ Female figures shown in the light from cane fires appear beside reflected light in windows that gives the appearance of stained glass. In the four-panelled *Woman of the cane fields* (1991) a woman carries a doll-like child, an image that recurs in most of the 1990s cane fields paintings; in 1994-5 this subject is fractured into a stained glass-like grid that also includes parrot imagery.

Horses and animals: An important element in Clem's teaching and thinking, as Dorothy Forbes recalls, was 'the horse culture':

He trained and rode as a horseman rather than within the equestrian culture. He was a 'horseman' in his life, his painting and particularly in his teaching. The strength, power and importantly the 'light touch' needed to maintain a horse association were nurtured in Clem from his early days—often in the hotel paddocks. ...In his teaching he consistently made the analogy of horsemanship, and while it initially perplexed his students, they eventually related to the analogy—the light touch, the firmness, the power, strength, the positive sense of accomplishment were all the elements of his teaching philosophy, and ones that he tried to apply to his life and work. They are elements found in any single painting. Horsemanship stayed with him until he died...On his grave is marked 'Artist and Horseman', and that is the best way to describe Clem.

Despite his love of horses, they appear in relatively few pictures. Forbes spoke about this 'horse culture' himself, telling the artist Tom Risley that he saw parallels in the coordination skills required between horse and rider in dressage and the artist making art.³⁵



[Cane fire] c1991
pastel on paper
70.0 x 98.0 cm



Lucy and friend 1992
pastel on paper
55.0 x 75.0 cm

Environment: Marine

Fish and marine life: The gloomy city paintings resulting from Forbes's 1983 visit to Sydney were soon replaced by a fish theme, in which he considered fish in connection with traditional Christian imagery, painting a series of works in gold and purples with fish as symbolic food of life. In the Lent paintings, his main fish images emerged from daily visits to the fish markets where families congregated. He observed 'all these dead fish looking at him, and suddenly saw the lively colourful vital fish of the Reef'.³⁶ On returning to Mackay, he started work on his fish series, accomplishing mature works. The artist John Rigby thought Forbes's exhibition of his fish series at the Martin Gallery in Townsville in the 1980s was 'very good',³⁷ and a key work was purchased by James Cook University in recognition of the university's role in marine biology.

Fishing villages and islands: The fishing villages of the Whitsunday bays figured in a number of paintings by Forbes, who used gouache with a colour range of pinks with frangipani themes to produce softer images and evoke the early settlers' efforts at homemaking. A major series of paintings of the Great Barrier Reef and its islands began to appear from 1985. Its central theme, as expressed by Forbes, was the unity of sea, heaven and universe.

Architecture

The distinctive architecture of North Queensland—its houses on cane farms, town and village buildings, churches,

stained glass, window reflections—appears widely in the artist's work, standing in isolation, melding into its environment or fractured into patterns, zones and grids. He also painted a series on Stradbroke Island houses.

Theatre, music and the circus

Forbes had a long involvement with theatre in Mackay, extending from 1970 to the 1990s. He was responsible for set design, backdrops and construction (for Mackay Comedy Theatre and Kudos Theatre Company) and from 1979 to 1990 regularly exhibited pastels at Athena Theatre Company productions, and in 1992 at the Mackay Conservatorium.³⁸ He argued for a role as 'art advisor' to the theatre. Forbes's painted backdrop for *Fiddler on the Roof* (1975) was reviewed as 'particularly effective'. Queensland Ballet Director Harry Haythorne in 1975 commissioned Forbes to paint cloths and scenery for a company production in Brisbane, which was subsequently cancelled owing to a lack of funding.³⁹ Forbes frequently portrayed local theatrical productions in his art works. For the Young Theatre Group, he executed a series of play-based works for foyer exhibition, and in 1979 he made a number of charcoal and pastel drawings based on *A Servant of Two Masters*, and exhibited them at performances of the play—in a tent, as part of the Carnival atmosphere.⁴⁰ He also drew at some performances. At Bakehouse Art Gallery (Mackay) and Martin Gallery (Townsville), Forbes had solo exhibitions on music themes.



Northern landscape 1971
oil on composition board
64.0 x 89.0 cm
Collection of Rockhampton Art Gallery



[Bay series] 1990
gouache over pencil on paper
37.0 x 53.0 cm

Clem's house was near the Showgrounds, and when the Show people came to Mackay, they bought paintings, and Clem's students worked on Show paintings.

People

Early portraits, family and self-portraits and other figures: In the early 1960s, Forbes painted self-portraits and several portraits on commission, the subjects mostly professional people—doctors, dentists and lawyers, a series on Lasseater and one on Pamphlett and Finnegan. In later work, people appear in different contexts, and often in interiors or exteriors with multiple references—people at fish counters (with some self-portraits), or solitary figures in fractured landscapes, on verandahs, or in rooms, sometimes with flowers on a table. Some paintings speak of personal emotions displaced on to environments that carry layers of meaning, such as *Somewhere there is an island* (1983).

Children: A series depicts the children of Clem and Dorothy: Lucy and Celie practise at the piano, Sophia sings and plays the recorder, and Matthew plays guitar. In the late paintings, children play below lorikeets—become-aeroplanes, surreal images in which there is tension between movement and stillness.

Still Life

As Forbes entered on the latter part of his life, elegiac themes and intimations of loss and regret became more prominent. He described two of his 1992 vase and flower

still lifes as 'sentinel' works: 'you just walk around them, and enter another space'. The light below and behind suggests headstones.

Religious and spiritual themes

In his final years, Clem Forbes's work often encompassed spiritual elements with 'great gashes of colour intersected with strong lines'. In his last months of life, Clem 'took up the physically demanding occupation of sculpture, carving human faces from blocks of hard-grained wood, sandstone and marble'.⁴¹

the artist speaks

I see my subject as portraiture through which multiple thematic references can be traced.

Artist's statement, 1995



Clem Forbes and students
photograph by art student



Cathy's cottages 1990
pastel on paper
50.0 x 70.5 cm



The midnight garden c1987
synthetic polymer paint on
composition board
94.0 x 130.0 cm



Eimeo triptych 1990
pastel on paper
100.0 x 243.0 cm (overall)
100.0 x 81.0 cm (each panel)

exhibiting career |

The arc of Clem Forbes's career of public exhibitions began in the late 1960s and continued until the 1990s. In that time his work featured in more than 80 solo and group exhibitions, mainly in Mackay, Townsville, Cairns, Rockhampton and other coastal North Queensland cities and towns, and in Brisbane, Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. At the suggestion of Stanislaus Rapotec, an important Australian artist then visiting Mackay, Forbes exhibited his work in 1971 at Mackay's Hotel Whitsunday. Rapotec returned to Sydney with several of Clem's paintings, where Bonython Gallery and Holdsworth Gallery agreed to exhibit his works, and also contacted galleries in Melbourne and Perth. Artist and critic James Gleeson in his review of the 1973 Holdsworth Gallery exhibition noted Forbes's 'good feeling for the Queensland landscape'.

Ralph Martin, who presented Forbes's first solo exhibition in Townsville in 1973, continued to show his work successfully. He had a Forbes solo almost annually until he closed the Martin Gallery in 1988. Martin found his work exciting: he was the 'one artist in the North who captured that rainforest-rich look'. Forbes seemed in these works to apprehend something revelatory. Martin also showed Forbes's first pastel solo exhibition.⁴² On several occasions his work was selected for hanging in the Trustees' and L.J. Harvey Prizes at the Queensland Art Gallery. A listing of the galleries showing the works of Clem Forbes in solo and group exhibitions during his lifetime appears near the end of this Catalogue.

Bakehouse Art Gallery

In May 1972, Clem and Dorothy Forbes opened the Bakehouse Art Gallery in Victoria Street, Mackay, introducing a commercial venue where the work of notable Australian artists could be exhibited, and one where Clem could show his own work and make personal evaluations of its merits against the works of significant Australian contemporary painters, and some emerging artists. Except for a small shop that briefly showed Ray Crooke in 1964, Bakehouse was Mackay's first gallery of real consequence. Dorothy Forbes managed the Gallery, which between 1972 and 1978 showed work by a wide range of contemporary artists and crafts people. Later it transformed into the Forbes Studio Gallery at another address. The opening mixed exhibition at Bakehouse Art Gallery included works by 'Robert Dickerson, Pro Hart, Frank de Silva, Brian Hatch, and Roy Churcher'.⁴³

Among the many other Australian elite artists and crafts people whose work was exhibited at Bakehouse were Arthur Boyd, John Brack, Alison Coaldrake, John Coburn, Ray Crooke, Lawrence Daws, Heather Dorrrough, Pam Dolinska, Donald Friend, James Gleeson, Gil Jamieson, Alun Leach-Jones, Carl McConnell, Mervyn Moriarty, Jon Molvig, Sidney Nolan, Joan Norman, Desiderius Orban, John Olsen, Peter Powditch, John Rigby, William Robinson, David Rose, Jan Senbergs, Kath and Len Shillam, Anneke Silver, Brett Whiteley, and Bill Yaxley, as well as travelling exhibitions for the Queensland

Arts Council, the Queensland Sculptors Society and exhibitions by the Mackay Art Society and other bodies. Forbes's students were excited by the opening of Bakehouse: there had been nothing like it before (or since),⁴⁴ but financial pressures eventually led to its demise.

murals |

Ayr, Eungella and Moranbah Murals

The Burdekin River mural (1982), which the artist titled *The River*, was Clem Forbes's first major mural. He envisaged it as calligraphy, using the barramundi and Dawson River salmon as symbols of Australia's northern rivers and depicting six times of day—dawn, sunrise, noon, afternoon, sunset, and night in six individual panels, each measuring 210 x 180 cm. Forbes introduced birds in panels appropriate to the time of day. In a statement hand-written in 1982, Forbes wrote:

Separately yet consecutively [six paintings] depict the moods of the river and the life it protects. ...I have endeavoured to make the river mural dramatic, delicate, and with a tremendous power of suggestion and imagination that I hope will ... arouse an even deeper interest in this river.



Alice 1985-6
(from the 'Alice in Wonderland' Theatre series)
pastel on paper
54.6 x 75.0 cm

The river mural was an inspiration for the fish theme, with its developing Christian and spiritual associations, that emerged in his exhibited work two years later.

Arranged on two curving walls and executed in 1985, the Lower Burdekin Home for the Aged mural in Ayr comprises two oil on composition board panels, each 240 x 550 cm. The artist dismissed suggestions that he employ 'walking into the sunset' imagery, and chose instead to paint regional images that he believed residents would enjoy reminiscing about.

Completed in 1987, the rainforest mural at Eungella National Park Information Centre, in the Pioneer Valley west of Mackay, was commissioned by the Department of National Parks and Wildlife. A mural project, 3.5 x seven metres, at Moranbah East State School in 1993 was undertaken as part of an artist in residence program, and involved pupils in Years 3-5 and Year 7.

Bicentennial Mural, Mackay Entertainment Centre

The 1988 Bicentennial project, five metres high and sixty metres long, was Clem Forbes's major mural. Dr. Maureen Duke's idea that Clem should undertake a mural for the proposed Centre was revived when it received Bicentennial funding. The mural was planned as a collage curving around the outside wall of the upper theatre, with shapes cut from many differently coloured pieces of Front Runner (a sound-absorbing flooring material) glued to the walls in a

technique similar to paperhanging.⁴⁵ The use of a collaging technique and subtle colour conjunctions gives the mural a painterly, softer appearance.

The mural concept, accommodating the architects' requirement for a work that unified the spaces, was themed on Captain Cook's negotiation of the Great Barrier Reef and Matthew Flinders's navigation up the Queensland coast. The image is a wave line from start to finish, with lines representing the mountains of the Great Dividing Range and the waves of the sea. Smaller forms depict fish seen from a microscopic point of view to become a more universal life form. Other circular forms are the stars, and multiple suns appear in yellows, together with a red moon. For the central forms of soaring birds, Clem chose shark fin shapes for wings to suggest a contemporary appearance. High at the centre, he included the shape of a Eureka Stockade pick. Other marine life depicted includes stingray, sucker fish and Reef fish in shapes reworked from photographs.

Design and installation of the mural presented a number of daily technical problems. Forbes said his most difficult problem was the discretionary distribution of sizes, shapes and forms to avoid repeating patterns and an appearance of crowding. The mural's size meant that too much strong colour would contribute a sense of heaviness to the space; if too light, the result would be weakly inadequate and lost. Forbes decided to use light greys, blues and creams with a judicious use of

strong colours, such as yellows, reds, greens, lavender, and black that conformed to the artist's intentions after many discussions with the architects, who at first preferred that yellows, reds and black be used sparingly and on a smaller scale, and that certain irregular lines be tidied up. As part of the design solution, Forbes decided to 'stay spare' at the top and bottom of the mural, avoiding small pieces and patches of strong colour. The artist, without a head for heights, also found it difficult to climb scaffolding. The cartoon drawing was done from the ground or on scaffolding, using a very long bamboo pole with charcoal attached. Andrew, Sophia and Simon Forbes assisted, and tradesmen handled the material process.

Forbes's lines in one mural section climb aggressively to the top of the theatre to convey a sense of crashing waves, and the sea in its uglier moods, interrupting the mural's generally flowing lines. Drawing the lines proved troublesome, because it involved in some places using a heavy, nine-metre pole. Surprise intrudes into other parts of Clem's mural: distorted leaf forms create sharp angles; colours contrast unexpectedly; jelly-like shapes and others cut in half appear in the sea. A flying fox seen against the moon during the project, a Ulysses butterfly and lorikeets that kept flying into window glass are included as personal touches.



[*Girl with flowers*] 1977
oil on composition board
91.0 x 96.0 cm

the art teacher | educator

The artist Tom Risley saw Forbes as a good teacher with a dry sense of humour who, but for electing to forge a living in a provincial environment, could have become a great teacher.⁴⁶ From 1976 to the 1990s, Clem Forbes contributed to a number of art education initiatives in Mackay and North Queensland, and held private art classes for children and adults at the Bakehouse Art Gallery, where he and Dorothy Forbes took well-attended children's four-day mixed media workshops during holiday periods. Forbes later held classes at the Forbes Studio Gallery. From 1976-1986 he participated in painting and drawing seminars sponsored by regional art societies in Mareeba, Cairns, Mackay, Rockhampton, and Townsville. In 1984 he was briefly involved with art classes at Mackay TAFE, but found the structured and bureaucratic procedures inimical to his artistic personality. In 1995 he gave seminars at the Gold Coast and Rockhampton, and in his final year of life, he conducted drawing seminars at Cooroy TAFE.

From 1988 Clem Forbes taught at regular winter and summer schools, immersing students in intensive art practice and rainforest observation at Eungella National Park, an initiative established by Forbes and sponsored by the Regional Arts Development Fund. From 1988 he held weekend seminars and private workshops at Slade Point and in the Mackay region; and from 1989 presented seminars and painting workshops funded by Artlink and the Queensland Arts Council. In 1993 Forbes taught painting at James Cook University's Mackay campus creative art

courses, and primary pupils at Moranbah in a mural project. In 1994 he was a project advisor for the Mackay Airport mural.⁴⁷ Once Clem got involved at classes, said Gordon Noscov, he 'just disappeared into art'.⁴⁸ Brisbane based artist Don Heron recalled that his teenage student experience of Clem Forbes showed him it was possible to live as an artist.⁴⁹

Teaching methods: Clem Forbes was a lateral thinker who not only educated his students in art, but also, as mentioned by Cathy Knezevic and Cecilie Bolton, taught them to think, and to see beyond the representational. He opened their eyes, teaching them to see differently.⁵⁰ As Irene Coburn puts it, 'he sketched in our minds':

*You'd realise each lesson took you in a particular direction; they were sessions not lessons. At the end you'd look at what he'd told you to do, and as you looked back, you'd see that the exercises were geared to a complete education.*⁵¹

In that way he gave students some of the means towards an understanding of modernist art. Many students recall his seemingly rambling talks that nevertheless, somehow, inspired them to hurry into their work with a rush of enthusiasm. Forbes was interested in all of the arts, and brought that to his classes. In one class someone mentioned Coleridge, so for twenty minutes Clem recited *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Sylvia Vermaat also noted the clever purposefulness of the classes where, though they seemed informal, nothing was an accident, and a comfort zone was not guaranteed.⁵² Many students, however,

reported that his teaching method was unstructured and not formulaic, being 'loose, free and gestural', and indeed his dislike of bureaucratic regimentation could make it seem so. Several said Forbes did not discuss craft, or the basics of painting, but 'left you with things in the mind' that the individual student had to interpret. Yet despite these perceptions, some elements of an underlying structure are discernible, owing a deal to common art teaching methods from the earlier 20th century. It was also, perhaps, influenced by his experiences of an earlier model of the apprenticeship system. In beginning a



Mother and Child c1984
gouache on paper
100.0 x 70.3 cm



Fish markets c1983
(from the 'Leni' series)
gouache on paper
54.5 x 77.0 cm

weekly class, Forbes spoke—often at great length, and with many digressions—about important artists and his at times caustic opinions of their work. He emphasised the importance of careful observation, a key to improvement. He also spoke of line, tone, form and colour; colour mixing; complementary colours (but not the colour wheel); warm and cool colours; mark making and drawing using collage; positive and negative space; compositional balance and placement; watercolour technique; Cubism, grids and other structures and the prime necessity of structure in painting; scumbling; and uses of horizontals, verticals, diagonals, and the serpentine. He did not generally allow students to use black, arguing that it was too easily employed as a convenient crutch.⁵³ He also recommended beginners avoid yellow because of its propensity to be used as false space. He mostly withheld comment, becoming detached and apparently unreceptive, to encourage students to find their own way. He wanted students to convey feeling in painting, but was not given to praising their efforts. The day's events or Clem's mood sometimes dictated the direction of student exercises.

Students absorbed all this, while not necessarily thinking that Forbes would help with technical matters; what they remember is his insistence on 'getting on with it': with chasing the idea, the inspiration, the discovery that would give life to painting after which technique came tumbling along.

Drawing: Clem Forbes did not regard his drawing as equal to his wife's superior

skills, and he adopted her suggestion of absorbing Nicolaides's principles as a basis for teaching drawing. Lesley Kane cites Clem's opinion that 'you don't have to be able to draw to be a painter. He always said: "as a teacher by watching your pupils you will be taught" '. But drawing in a Clem Forbes class was never a frivolous matter, and he taught it intensely, moving from numerous stick figures in different poses to curves and other formations.

Life classes: Cilla Martland, a life model for two years in the late 1980s at Clem's George Street Studio, remembers the discomforts of adopting poses for long periods, being cold in winter (and hot in summer), but 'really enjoying the conversations of intelligent people, where interesting things were happening'.⁵⁴ Forbes was adept at posing models, rejecting poses that looked too 'placed'. Students were asked to do a lot of quick sketches, with many repositionings of the model, or a change of gesture. Method was more obvious in the life drawing class.⁵⁵ The models were mostly female, and sometimes clothed.

Weekend workshops and summer schools: At the Eungella Summer School, students stayed at the Broken River Mountain Retreat, and travelled a scenic route each day to the Crediton studio, in a former school. Students were occupied with drawing, wash drawing and painting. Other venues included Slade Point, local high schools, adult education and later TAFE, mining towns, and Simon and

Lorraine Gray-McConnell's property, Netherdale.

Student and Forbes Group exhibitions: A number of these were held at the Mackay City Library and other venues. Forbes and the artists critiqued the works before selection and hanging.

Leonie Wood, like other students, thought the classes given by Clem Forbes were not simply about art, but also social occasions. That was perhaps why he had an enormous effect on the psyche, particularly of women. Michelle O'Hara believes she was 'very lucky to have had that education. It wasn't just about art, it was a wider, broadening education, about connections'. Kay Bampton, another of his students, perhaps summed up what many felt about the artist: 'I always felt it was a great privilege to know Clem'.



Clem Forbes and students at Summer School, Crediton Hall
Photograph by Summer School student



The fish in the sea envy nothing c1984
mixed media on paper
64.0 x 101.0 cm

exhibitions | solo

1967, 1968, 1969	Kennigo Street Gallery, Fortitude Valley, Brisbane
September 1971	Hotel Whitsunday, Mackay (Opened by Lady Phyllis Cilento)
November 1971	Rockhampton City Gallery
1972-1978	Bakehouse Art Gallery, Mackay
1972-1975	Holdsworth Gallery, Sydney
1973-1979	Ralph Martin's Pharmacy Galley (First solo exhibition in Townsville 1973; became Martin Gallery in 1980)
1974, 1975	The Young Australian Gallery, Brisbane
1975-1977	Trinity Gallery, Cairns
1975, 1976, 1977	Paul Bowker Galleries, Brisbane
1976	Munster Arms Gallery, Melbourne
1980-1988	Martin Gallery, Townsville (Regular exhibitions until Gallery's closure in 1988)
1978	Gallery Up Top, Rockhampton
1978	Rothesay Gallery, Brisbane
1979, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1988, 1990	Athena Theatre Company, Mackay
1979-mid 1990s	Forbes Studio Gallery, Mackay
1984, 1985	Gallery 111, Rockhampton
1990	Mission Beach Gallery
From 1990	Lake Street Gallery, Cairns
1992	Mackay Conservatorium
1997	Clem Forbes Tribute, Mackay

the artist speaks

(On drawing): *I believe it to be the basis of advancing art.*

5 November 1994 news report



Fish swimming 1983
mixed media on paper
47.0 x 62.5 cm



Fish school 1983
mixed media on paper
46.0 x 62.0 cm
James Cook University Collection, Townsville



Glass Houses 1996
pastel on paper
57.0 x 79.0 cm

exhibitions | group and competition entries

1966	Kennigo Street Gallery, Fortitude Valley, Brisbane
1968	Royal National Agricultural and Industrial Association of Queensland
1968, 1970	David Jones Art Prize, Brisbane
1968, 1971	Redcliffe Art Contest
1969 or before	Franz Beak-Gow Gallery, Brisbane
1972	Gold Coast City Art Prize
1972	Bonython Gallery, Sydney (Four Queensland Artists)
1970s	Lister Gallery, Perth
1973, 1975, 1976	Trustees' Prize, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
1973, 1977	L.J. Harvey Prize, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
1974	Barry Stern Gallery, Sydney
1974	Holdsworth Gallery, Sydney
1975	Holdsworth Gallery, Sydney (Six Queensland Artists)
1974-1975	The Young Australian Gallery, Brisbane
1975-1977	Trinity Gallery, Cairns
1977	Gallery Up Top, Rockhampton
1977	Holdsworth Gallery, Sydney
1978	Gallery Up Top, Rockhampton
1978	Queensland Festival of Arts, Queensland College of Art (Ten Queensland Artists)
From late 1970s	Attic Gallery, Rockhampton
1997	Page Galleries, Noosa



Glass Houses c1996
charcoal on paper
57.0 x 79.0 cm
Collection of Dorothy Forbes

Art prizes

1967
1970
1971-1973
1977

Non-traditional Award, Cairns Art Society
Cairns Contemporary Art Prize
Mackay Caltex Art Prize
Ernest Henry Memorial Art Contest, Cloncurry Art Society

the artist speaks

There is no substitute for the most disciplined learning. Today's new forms are being built on the past, and we must be familiar with it.
Rockhampton Morning Bulletin, 19 December 1978

Art judging

1969
From 1975

Cunnamulla Show
Caltex Art Prize, Cairns; Mareeba Art Society;
Townsville Art Society; Sarina Art Society

Major commissions

1982
1983
1985
1987
1987-1988

[Mural] Burdekin Theatre, Ayr
[Mural] Lower Burdekin Home for the Aged, Ayr
Stained Glass Doors, Dr Warren Brooks, Mackay
[Mural] Eungella National Park Information Centre
[Mural] Bicentennial Mural, Mackay Entertainment Centre

1989

Cover Illustration for *The Last Part of the Day* (James Cook University)

1993

[Mural] Moranbah East State School and Moranbah State School (Artist in Residence Program)

1994

Stained Glass Panel, Robert Dunn, Mackay



Lucy in the garden c1983-4
etching
14.0 x 22.0 cm

Public Collections

Artbank
Artspace Mackay
Australian Broadcasting Commission, Brisbane
Burdekin Theatre, Ayr
Central Queensland University, Mackay Campus
Cloncurry Art Society
Gatton College, University of Queensland
James Cook University, Townsville
Mackay Entertainment Centre
Mater Hospital, Mackay
Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville
Qantas Airways
Queensland University of Technology Art Collection, Brisbane
Rockhampton Art Gallery



Fish markets c1983
(from the 'Lent' series)
gouache on paper
54.5 x 77.0 cm

works | in exhibition

Measurements are in centimetres, height preceding width

Works are in private collections unless otherwise stated

Self portrait 1959
oil on composition board
34.2 x 31.0 cm
Collection of Dorothy Forbes

Self portrait 1960
oil on canvas
30.0 x 29.5 cm
Collection of Dorothy Forbes

Leneen Forde 1963
oil on canvas
94.5 x 78.0 cm
Collection of Leneen Forde AC
Commissioned by Francis Gerard Forde

Ama and the possum 1970
entry David Jones Art Prize 1970
oil on composition board
87.0 x 110.0 cm
Collection of Nicholas Cilento

Houses by the sea 1971
synthetic polymer paint on
composition board
62.0 x 85.0 cm
Collection of Artspace Mackay,
Mackay City Council
Gift of the Mackay Club 2003

Northern landscape 1971
oil on composition board
64.0 x 89.0 cm
Collection of Rockhampton Art Gallery

Summer trees 1971
synthetic polymer paint on
composition board
58.5 x 84.0 cm
Collection of Mackay Art Society,
Gift of the Estate of Geoff Nolan

O'Neil's place 1972
oil on composition board
62.5 x 90.0 cm
Winner of the Caltex Art Prize 1972
Collection of Artspace Mackay,
Mackay City Council

Brigalow landscape 1973
oil on composition board
62.5 x 93.0 cm

Burning brigalow triptych 1973
oil on composition board
106.8 x 252.3 cm
(each panel 106.8 x 84.1 cm)

Ti- tree swamp (in the wet) c1974
synthetic polymer paint on paper
101.7 x 64.0 cm

Ti- tree swamp (in the dry) c1974
synthetic polymer paint on paper
101.7 x 64.0 cm

Portrait of Lorraine c1975
air-brush on paper
91.0 x 58.0 cm

Dorothy c1975
air-brush on paper
64.0 x 51.7 cm
Collection of Dorothy Forbes

Sophia c1975
air-brush on paper
64.0 x 51.7 cm
Collection of Dorothy Forbes

Rainforest, Falls Creek 1975
synthetic polymer paint on
composition board
86.0 x 94.0 cm
Queensland University of Technology Art
Collection, Brisbane

Strangler fig 1976
air-brush on paper
63.5 x 51.0 cm

Strangler fig 1975
oil on composition board
121.0 x 91.0 cm
Collection of Canegrowers, Mackay District

*Scribble gum trunks,
Stradbroke Island* 1976
air-brush on paper
100.0 x 62.0 cm

*Scribble gum trunks,
Stradbroke Island* 1976
air-brush on paper
95.5 x 63.7 cm

[House in cane field] 1976
oil on composition board
57.0 x 89.0 cm

Cane farm at dusk 1976
oil on composition board
61.5 x 89.0 cm

[Girl with flowers] 1977
oil on composition board
91.0 x 96.0 cm

Rainforest mist [Rainforest Canopy] 1977
oil on composition board
86.0 x 91.0 cm

[Tropical houses] 1977
watercolour and pen on paper
37.0 x 55.0 cm

Rainforest 1978
oil on composition board
121.0 x 133.0 cm
Collection of Artspace Mackay,
Mackay City Council
Gift of the Queensland Arts Council,
Mackay Branch 1980

A Servant of Two Masters 1979
(from the Theatre series)
pastel on paper
49.0 x 64.0 cm

[Circus] 1979
gouache on paper
36.0 x 54.0 cm

[Reclining nudes] 1979
charcoal on three sheets of paper
59.5 x 62.5 cm (overall);
23.5 x 62.5, 10.4 x 62.5, 14.7 x 62.5
(each sheet)

[Brigalow with lake] 1979
watercolour on paper
25.0 x 72.0 cm

Fire in the brigalow 1979
oil on composition board
90.0 x 90.0 cm

Brigalow country 1979
oil on canvas
91.0 x 121.5 cm

Clowning lorikeets 1980
pastel on paper
36.0 x 35.6 cm

Rainforest pool and parrots 1981
pastel on paper
53.0 x 72.0 cm

Girl reading c1981
charcoal on paper
74.5 x 54.0 cm

[Seated nude from rear] 1981
pastel on paper
89.0 x 65.0 cm

Tropical bay 1981
linocut ed. 2/5
30.0 x 30.0 cm (image)

Frangipani 1983
etching Artist's Proof
33.5 x 50.2 cm (plate)

Turtle and moon c1983
etching and aquatint Artist's Proof
30.2 x 44.8 cm

Somewhere there is an island 1983
(from the 'Reef' series)
mixed media on paper
65.0 x 102.0 cm

Fish swimming 1983
mixed media on paper
47.0 x 62.5 cm

Fish school 1983
mixed media on paper
46.0 x 62.0 cm
James Cook University Collection, Townsville

Mayor and Councillors 1983
(from the 'Pied Piper' series)
pastel on paper
36.5 x 53.0 cm

Figure of a woman c1983
(from the 'Lent' series)
gouache on paper
101.0 x 64.0 cm

Fish markets c1983
(from the 'Lent' series)
gouache on paper
54.5 x 77.0 cm

The crowded day 1983
(from the 'Lent' series)
gouache and charcoal on paper
63.0 x 98.0 cm
Collection of Simon Forbes

Lucy in the garden c1983-4
etching
14.0 x 22.0 cm

Forest and parrots 1984
mixed media on card
78.0 x 98.0 cm
Collection of Sanders Turner Ellick Architects
Pty Ltd, Mackay

Bay at night 1984
synthetic polymer paint on paper
51.0 x 64.0 cm

The fish in the sea envy nothing c1984
mixed media on paper
64.0 x 101.0 cm

Bright forest 1984
synthetic polymer paint on
composition board
108.5 x 159.0 cm
Perc Tucker Regional Gallery Collection,
Townsville

Mother and Child c1984
gouache on paper
100.0 x 70.3 cm

Stained glass suite
(three pairs of door panels) 1985
Manufactured by Wayne Caldwell, Mackay
leaded coloured Italian and French glass

Rainforest lorikeets 1985
pastel on paper
47.0 x 62.0 cm

I [Queensland houses, Ulysses butterfly,
fish]
123.5 x 20.0 cm (each panel)

II Eungella [turtles in water, sun, moon,
kingfisher]
119.0 x 32.3 cm (each panel)

III Swamp birds [spoonbill, egrets, parrots]
125.0 x 32.0 cm (each panel)

Cartoon for stained glass panels 1985
pastel on paper
32.0 x 40.0 cm (32.0 x 119.0 cm fold
out)
Collection of Dorothy Forbes

Brisbane River from Hamilton 1985
watercolour on paper
32.5 x 48.0 cm
Collection of Dr David and Mrs Eileen
Cilento

The last part of the day 1985
pastel on paper
53.0 x 72.0 cm
Commissioned by James Cook University
(book cover design)
Collection of Dorothy Forbes

Alice 1985-6
(from the 'Alice in Wonderland' Theatre
series)
pastel on paper
54.6 x 75.0 cm

Sophie playing recorder 1986
pastel on paper
50.0 x 68.0 cm

The midnight garden c1987
synthetic polymer paint on
composition board
94.0 x 130.0 cm

Nellie Melba and the cat 1988
pastel on paper
72.0 x 52.5 cm

Little pink church 1989
pastel on paper
54.0 x 74.0 cm

Mountain village 1990
pastel on paper
96.5 x 67.5 cm

[*Bay series*] 1990
gouache over pencil on paper
37.0 x 53.0 cm

Eimeo triptych 1990
pastel on paper
100.0 x 243.0 cm (overall)
100.0 x 81.0 cm (each panel)

Lorikeets 1990
pastel on paper
37.0 x 26.0 cm
Collection of St Patrick's College, Mackay

Cathy's cottages 1990
pastel on paper
50.0 x 70.5 cm

Woman of the cane fields 1-4 1991
oil on composition board
142.5 x 119.6 cm (each panel)
Collection of Central Queensland
University, Mackay campus

[*Burning cane*] 1991
pastel on paper
55.0 x 73.0 cm

[*Cane fire*] c1991
pastel on paper
70.0 x 98.0 cm

Lucy and friend 1992
pastel on paper
55.0 x 75.0 cm

Playing Beattie Bow 1992
(from 'The Magic Bow' Theatre series)
pastel on paper
50.0 x 76.0 cm

Houses on hillside 1993
pastel on paper
73.3 x 53.2 cm

[*Stained glass painting*] 1994-5
pastel on paper
68.0 x 97.0 cm

The Jazz Players 1996
pastel and gouache on paper
70.0 x 100.0 cm
Collection of Celie Forbes

Children playing 1996
pastel on paper
43.0 x 63.0 cm
Collection of Dorothy Forbes

Glass Houses c1996
charcoal on paper
57.0 x 79.0 cm
Collection of Dorothy Forbes

Glass Houses c1996
pastel and charcoal on paper
75 x 55 cm
Collection of Dorothy Forbes

Glass Houses 1996
pastel on paper
57.0 x 79.0 cm

the artist speaks

*Nearly a Horseman & almost an
artist.*

Note in the Artist's handwriting in a letter to
his elder sister Julie, dated February 1988
(the artist's capitalisation)



Glass Houses c1996
pastel and charcoal on paper
75 x 55 cm
Collection of Dorothy Forbes

endnotes

- ¹ Information in this Outline was provided by the artist's daughter, Sophia Forbes, his widow, Dorothy Forbes, and drawn from curatorial interviews and a number of media and other published and unpublished materials.
- ² Curator's Interview with Ralph Martin 8 June 2004.
- ³ Unidentified newspaper clipping, 31 March 1969.
- ⁴ Curator's Interview with Dr David Cilento, 6 June 2004.
- ⁵ Forbes could have read a 1919 publication: Colin Colohan, ed., *Max Meldrum: His Art and His Views* (Melbourne: McCubbin) or *The Science of Appearances: As Formulated and Taught by Max Meldrum*, published 1950. Later, in Mackay, Forbes won a prize judged by Brisbane artist Caroline Barker, who had been praised for her tonal painting skills when a student at the Victorian National Gallery School in Melbourne. (Information about Caroline Barker from Curator's Interview with her, 1982.)
- ⁶ Ralph Martin opened his Pharmacy Gallery in Townsville in July the same year, becoming the Martin Gallery in 1980. Curator's Interview with Ralph Martin, 8 June 2004. Forbes showed at both galleries from 1973-88 with a solo exhibition most years. Earlier, in 1970, Norma Hempenstall, with Kevin Langford, opened Gallery Up Top in Rockhampton. Lal Lanyon became the Director of Gallery Up Top in 1971. In Cairns Clem Forbes exhibited at Trinity Gallery which was opened by James and Rosemary Macfarlane in 1975.
- ⁷ Curator's Interview, 10 June 2004.
- ⁸ The artist, quoted in Helen Broadhurst's interview 'Clem Forbes' in *Out & About*, Mackay and *Whitsundays* magazine, January 1993.
- ⁹ Curator's Interview with Gordon Noscov, 20 April 2004.
- ¹⁰ Curator's discussions with several interviewees, 19 April 2004.
- ¹¹ Curator's Interview with Gordon Noscov, 20 April 2004. Several students, including Lesley Kane and Rick Wood, also commented on Forbes's ability to excite and inspire. One said she still draws on what she learnt in Clem's life classes that she attended 24 years ago.
- ¹² Curator's Interview with Lesley Kane, 20 April 2004: 'Previously, all we'd seen were paintings in browns and creams that were more relevant to the outback. Clem came here with those brilliant greens and the beautiful tropical colours that were quite a novelty, and fascinating. Mackay is a patchwork of greens everywhere you look'.
- ¹³ Curator's Interview with Tom Risley, 2 June 2004.
- ¹⁴ Curator's Interview with Rick Wood, 20 April 2004.
- ¹⁵ Curator's Interview with Lesley Kane, 20 April 2004.
- ¹⁶ Curator's Interview with Sylvia Vermaat, 22 April 2004.
- ¹⁷ Curator's Interview with Juanita Wallman, 19 April 2004.
- ¹⁸ *Rockhampton Morning Bulletin*, 11 December 1978, p. 9. Forbes studied printmaking for a time in Rockhampton.
- ¹⁹ Curator's Interview with Ralph Martin, 8 June 2004.
- ²⁰ Curator's Interview with Raye Williams, 21 April 2004.
- ²¹ Curator's Interview with Raye Williams, 21 April 2004.
- ²² Lesley Kane remembers Forbes as saying frequently in classes that he 'could not draw', and that his wife Dorothy was very skilled in this genre. She believes that his reservations about his drawing skills were another element in his move towards colour. Curator's Interview with Lesley Kane, 20 April 2004.
- ²³ Compiled from the recollections of a number of students, including Rick and Leonie Wood, Kay Bampton, Cecilie Bolton, Lesley Kane, Lyn Ahmat, Raye Williams and Sylvia Vermaat.
- ²⁴ Unidentified newspaper clipping, 31 March 1969.
- ²⁵ *Rockhampton Morning Bulletin*, 19 December 1978
- ²⁶ Curator's Interview with Michelle O'Hara, 19 April 2004.
- ²⁷ Curator's Interviews, among others, with Bob and Julie Brock (2 May, 2004), Lesley Kane (20 April 2004), Dr David Cilento (29 May 2004) and Lorraine Gray-McConnell (3 May 2004).
- ²⁸ Unidentified newspaper clipping, 31 March 1969.
- ²⁹ Curator's Interview with Raye Williams, 21 April 2004.
- ³⁰ Curator's Interview with John Rigby, 2 June 2004. Rigby has painted in the Mackay region, and presented workshops and adjudicated for the Pioneer Art Group. He noted it was unusual for him to exchange works with a fellow artist. Clem Forbes exchanged work with other artists including Stan Rapotec. He also acquired works by fellow artists from part of the proceeds of sales of his own work at galleries. (Clem Forbes correspondence with Stan Rapotec, Sydney, 1971, and Jim Macfarlane, Cairns, 4 April 1975.)
- ³¹ Curator's Interview with Dorothy Forbes, 27 February 2004.
- ³² The artist, quoted in Helen Broadhurst's interview 'Clem Forbes' in *Out & About*, Mackay and *Whitsundays* magazine, January 1993.
- ³³ Curator's Interview with Raye Williams, 21 April 2004.
- ³⁴ Artist's *Curriculum Vitae*.
- ³⁵ Curator's Interview with Tom Risley, 2 June 2004.
- Juanita Wallman recalled that Forbes 'always had his riding pants or his riding boots on'.
- ³⁶ Curator's Interview with Dorothy Forbes.
- ³⁷ Curator's interview with John Rigby, 2 June 2004.
- ³⁸ Information from the artist's *Curriculum Vitae*.
- ³⁹ Unidentified newspaper clipping, 9 April 1975. Letter discussing details from Kenneth Rayner, 24 December 1975.
- ⁴⁰ Unidentified newspaper clipping, 4 April 1979.
- ⁴¹ Raye Williams, unidentified newspaper cutting, 1997.
- ⁴² Curator's Interview with Ralph Martin, 8 June 2004.
- ⁴³ The artist, quoted in Helen Broadhurst's interview.
- ⁴⁴ Curator's Interview with Rick Wood, 20 April 2004. Several other people mentioned that Clem Forbes sometimes paid an account with a painting.
- ⁴⁵ Information on the Mackay Entertainment Centre mural has come largely from a video in which the artist walks along the mural, discussing it with Janet Brooks and from the Sanders Turner Ellick mural file.
- ⁴⁶ Curator's Interview with Tom Risley, 2 June 2004.
- ⁴⁷ Information from the artist's *Curriculum Vitae*.
- ⁴⁸ Curator's Interview with Gordon Noscov, 20 April 2004.
- ⁴⁹ Curator's Interview with Don Heron, 20 April 2004.
- ⁵⁰ Curator's Interview with Cathy Knezevic, 2 June 2004, and letter from Cecilie Bolton, 27 January 2004. Cathy recalls Forbes advising her in a life class not to look at the paper but at the model 'as though an ant is walking over the body'.
- ⁵¹ Curator's Interview with Irene Coburn, 7 May 2004.
- ⁵² Curator's Interview with Sylvia Vermaat, 22 April 2004.
- ⁵³ Letter to Curator from Lesley Kane, 20 April 2004.
- ⁵⁴ Curator's Interview with Cilla Martland, 22 April 2004.
- ⁵⁵ Curator's Interview with Kay Bampton, 20 April 2004.



The Jazz Players 1996
pastel and gouache on paper
70.0 x 100.0 cm
Collection of Celie Forbes

Forbes

