Section 1 - Introduction

Landscape imagery has been part of Australian history since its Aboriginal beginnings, through European invasion and settlement to the present day. The question of why it has been a pervasive form of visual expression in this country in terms of culture and identity continues to be assessed and re-assessed by a variety of historical, cultural and literary writers. This re-assessment can be related to a vast number of historical and contemporary landscape images. This is evident in the diversity of styles used to document the Australian landscape which spans the primordial forests of John Glover (1769-1849), the pastures of Arthur Streeton (1867-1943) and the urban wastelands of Jeffrey Smart (b.1921). The landscape has been a source of many ideas for Australian artists continues to be so.

That landscape imagery remains central to Australian identity is evidenced by its continual use as subject matter as well as its strong following in both the domestic and international art market despite competition from other visual artforms. With each new visual interpretation of the landscape, new values and debate arise about the possible meanings of the landscape and its relevance to an Australian identity and culture.

A country's identity is a complex and constantly evolving construction arising out of popular culture, media, high culture, history, political, social and economic milieu. The relation of all these factors creates an interactive structure in which ideas about identity and culture are mutually reinforced. For example the promotion of the outback as a fashionable holiday destination is reinforced by the history of art imagery of these sites which gives the outback special qualities for Australians. Social and political values about the original inhabitans and an understanding of the true origins of Australia further create interest in this area. This interaction is how ideas about culture and identity is constructed. Landscape imagery provides an interesting window on this phenomenon and is a significant visual component of culture and identity.

This paper examines a diverse but restricted sample of landscape work in Australia and assesses how this reflects Australian culture and identity. This is done by analysing the social art history of a small number
of writers, together with a case study. The writers and references chosen are the social history of Ian Burn and his co-authors, the cultural and literary study of Anne Marie Willis and a case study of the ‘Artists of Hill End’ 1995 exhibition.

The parameters of the authors’ writings are identified in section two of this paper. Section three examines the construction of identity and culture as described in Burn et al’s *The Necessity of Art* and Burn’s *National Life and Landscape*. Examples of landscape imagery will be discussed in relation to his ideas. Anne Marie Willis’ *Illusions of Identity* is discussed in section four. Section five examines Burn’s and Willis’ work in relation to Barthes’ ideas of mythology. Section 6 discusses ‘The Artists of Hill End’ exhibition as an current example of ideas of culture and identity and the arguments set out in this paper.

In conclusion I will argue that the articulation of Australian culture and identity as seen in landscape imagery is an theoretical construction based on different kinds of discourse. The development of this construction may vary considerably, leading to different concepts and conclusions about the nature of culture and identity. While some concepts and conclusions about identity validate each other, others are contradictory. From this it follows that certain concepts are less valid than others or are perceived to be in need of re-assessment. Hence this paper contributes to the re-assessment of culture and identity in Australian landscape painting.
Section 2 - Overview

The parameters of this study are set by the work of Ian Burn et al and Anne Marie Willis. These authors have been chosen because they have written about the different aspects of the relationship of Australian landscape imagery to Australian identity and culture and therefore are appropriate for this study. Similar concepts about the nature of identity and culture emerge in their writing as well as marked differences as outlined below. The interplay between these concepts as articulated by these writers becomes a reference point for how culture and identity is constructed since each represents a different view of history and its analysis. This section will outline some of the central concepts around which their work is constructed.

In The Necessity of Australian Art and National Life and Landscape the authors use a social art historical method in their discussion of culture and identity. In The Necessity of Australian Art they do this firstly by identifying the main historical sources relevant to their study such as the work of Moore’s The Story of Australian Art, Bernard Smith’s Place Taste and Tradition and Australian Painting. The time chosen by Burn in National Life and Landscape is the interwar period. This was a era in which values and ideas about identity and culture were significantly developed as evidenced by the development of the art production and its significance in society according to Burn. Moore’s empirical data on this period is considered relevant because it characterises a ‘unified view of art production’ and its dispersal through existing market channels (Burn, et al, 1988, p.13). In addition, Smith’s analysis of this period is also relevant because it describes the work of artists which creates a methodology for defining attitudes and systems of value in the assessment of Australian art and the development of Australian art history.

As a social history, this choice of source material and time period by Burn et al represents a body of information which are then classified into a series of social, political and economic frame works. By analysing this, Burn et al can identify a set of ordered information or a totality of these forces. It thus becomes a holistic view of the relevant social, political and economic events which signify certain values within the society. Within this framework, value in art can be identified as ‘between production, consumption, distribution and exchange, breaking down, the separateness
of each activity so that <one> can comprehend each as a distinct moment within a differentiated and structured totality' (Pollock, *Framing Feminism*, p.6). In a similar way, Burn *et al* in chapter 1 of *The Necessity of Australian Art* transfers Marxist social history to landscape imagery in relation to Australian culture and identity. Art as an object is a product which is given 'value' in culture not only by its production and consumption, but by its commonly understood meaning in culture, which is related to identity.

Hence the work of Burn *et al* (1988 p.24) in this study revolves around the development of economic, political and social structures in Australian society in the period between the wars. This analysis reveals a set of social practices which became a system by the end of this period. In images this is related to commonly held understandings of the system of representation or signification that were being used. Certain political and economic events give the imagery a meaning which is supported by this understanding. This set of relations becomes a system of communication between all of these different facets of society. Ultimately the essence of the relationship between landscape imagery, culture and identity is as a signifying system in which images are produced and consumed and given meaning and value accordingly. It is these commonly held values which are the basis for identity and culture.

As a system of communication, the development of culture and identity can be considered a constructed myth. Barthes, in *Mythologies*, describes myth as a system of signification in which it must have form and this form must have historical limits and conditions of use (p.121). Burn *et al* in their selection of particular texts and a defined time period are constructing a myth which is conveyed by a particular discourse, which in this case is the discourse of social art history. As a myth it may be constructed but the concepts within the discourse are not necessarily fixed; if the historical form which creates the signification is changed then the myth will also change. In other words, historical form conditions and informs the construction of the myth. Burn’s work as a form of myth represents a set of relations which has been structured specifically to identify certain aspects of the nature of culture and identity.

Similarly Anne Marie Willis’ analysis of visual imagery during the interwar period as well as other periods also attempts to identify the
meaning of culture and identity. She utilises a variety of discourses in her analysis to investigate how the narratives of Australian art history have lead to the constructions of the idea of “national culture”. She states that her study is not meant to be comprehensive because she is not attempting to summarise trends arising from historical events. Rather her basic aim is to reveal how these ideas have operated in the construction of cultural nationalism.

Her book *Illusions of Identity* is an interdisciplinary study of ideas and how ideas from high and low culture, literature, philosophy, etc. shape culture and Australian identity. The reasons given for this are that many cultural histories use the chronology of political and economic events to illustrate the interplay between the different sectors of society and culture. Her focus on ideas is a kaleidoscope through which a variety of themes can be revealed. Willis' analysis is thematic, it is a history of ideas not a chronological history. She therefore looks at these themes in different time frames. For example, she cites the image of red hills in Australian painting as being perhaps more representative of national identity today than some of the Heidelberg images commonly associated with national identity from the historical narrative. Hence she is questioning the idea of what an artwork represents in a particular period and how this may change in another time period. This also brings into question the association of these particular ideas or narratives with national identity.

Willis' analysis is essentially a process of interrogation of the variety of discourses used to construct the idea of Australian identity. She analyses and looks for a possible “other” way of viewing Australian culture and its inscribed values as determined by a visual discourse. Fundamentally she questions the idea of nation as a construction resulting from recognised structural forces such as the political and the economic. The significance of this is that in doing so, she also interrogates the meaning of visual culture and the schema of national identity that is tied to the idea of nation. She questions whether artwork that is meant to represent a ‘national tradition’ represents national identity at all; and further if it does, how does it do so? In her analysis, she examines a variety of different images from high and low culture and suggests how each is equally significant. She does this to upset the hierarchy created by cultural values. In the void created by her interrogations, new meanings and possible interpretations are suggested. These remain only as
suggestions because she states that she does not want to spell out a new discourse or orthodoxy about the nature of identity but wants to create new critical insight into traditional ideas and ways of thinking about the landscape, culture and identity.

In addition to the above, Willis' work is related to a feminist art history in its critique of the conventions of art historical order.

A feminist critique of the discipline is needed which can pierce cultural-ideological limitations, to reveal biases and inadequacies not merely in regard to the question of women artists, but in the formulation of the crucial questions of the discipline as a whole. (Pollock, p.2)

Hence while Willis' work may not be described as specifically feminist, her work has the overall objective of looking at biases in relation to landscape revealing inadequacies in the more commonly held beliefs about culture and identity in Australia.

For each of these writers, culture and identity has a different meaning due to the methodology of constructing or deconstructing meaning and value. Burn is attempting to construct a specific narrative or discourse while Willis is critically analysing narratives and discourses. Burn uses specific time frames whereas Willis does not. In many ways Burn & Willis are opposites. However they are similar in that they both view culture and identity as something that cannot be described succinctly. Since both have a different approach to the issues of identity and culture, an examination of both approaches will hopefully reveal other aspects of culture and identity.
Section 3 - A Configuration of Identity and Culture

In this section, this paper examines the discussion of culture and identity found in *The Necessity of Australian Art* and *National Life and Landscape*. To do this, Burn *et al* analyse landscape imagery between the wars, changes in that imagery, the artists' relation to that imagery, the organisation of artistic practice and the constitution of an audience (Burn *et al*, 1988 p.11). The main art texts related to these social and economic structures are assessed and the values which are expressed and given meaning in relation to art are identified. This is a contextual and historical analysis in which art is evaluated and understood in relation to these values. These values are seen to express specific aspects of Australian culture which are part of a broader historical development. They use this form of analysis as the basis of assessment and interpretation of an historical period. In addition, their analysis could have more current relevance.

The above contexts enable Burn *et al* to outline the specific character of culture and identity within these reference points. The time period of between the wars chosen by them is an essential starting point because they are able to describe and locate the development of a regional tradition which they view as a social and cultural determinant of the period. These social and cultural determinants or values become the basis for an independent cultural identity.

The starting point for their construction of culture and identity begins with the definition of a regional tradition (Burn *et al* p.19). They view the study of this tradition as critical for understanding the role that regionalist values have at this time. It is a foundation discourse from which other developments can be given context. Moore's history of art is a relevant historical sketch of this tradition because it is a 'comprehensive expression of regionally based attitudes and values.' (Burn *et al*, p.6). Moore's study is used by Burn *et al* to identify the main structural changes in Australian society and the economy which created forms of national tradition in Australia. They also acknowledge that in this period between the wars and afterwards, attitudes towards "modernity" and "progress" were being developed which were reflected in art practice. These ideas were developed particularly in the work of Bernard Smith, whose work characterises some of these main concepts by looking at the careers of
artists, their intentions and the body of work they produced. Smith details the individual contributions of McCubbin, Streeton and Roberts in the development of the Heidelberg School. McCubbin ‘the prof’ was the propagator of ideas about the national quality in artwork and in life. He is recorded as being a great raconteur of bush stories as well as an artist who used the realities of life in the bush as subject matter for his paintings. The concepts in this work were important precursors for Roberts and Streeton who continued to use bush themes in their work and developed the light filled nationalist style which became the signature of the Heidelberg School and subsequently a symbol of Australianness (Smith, 1991, p.82). Specifically, Burn et al see all these conditions as creating and forming an integrated and historically specific form (Burn et al p.11). These forms are constructed from the values which evolve from art practice and the artists who created it.

In this framework, the work of Smith and Moore is complementary and provides Burn et al with a comprehensive view of relations in which values in artwork can be identified. Smith’s work as a selected story or narrative of Australian art details the significant work of a period, who produced it, its technique and the artists’ intentions. Moore’s account is the primary source material which details and documents all the events that lead up to the development of the art industry between the wars. The themes that Moore uses in The Story of Australian Art are categories such as life in the camps, the boom, the Australian school of landscape and national life are discussed in Burn et al. By collaging these two accounts together Burn et al are able to create a comprehensive interpretative structure which addresses the abstract ideas of identity and culture (The Necessity of Art, Burn, p.13).

In considering identity and culture in Australian art history, the period between the wars was a significant period in Australian art history for a number of reasons. Art practice in the 1920's became an industry because artists could make a living selling landscape work in particular which meant that art could be a profession (Moore, Vol I. p.83). Art had become part of a "complex network of social and political relationships which constituted an industry based on the production and consumption of art and which was conceived by some as integral with industry and commerce in a wider sense" (Lambert in National Life and Landscape, Burn, p. 27). This phenomenon meant that the impact of art production
was greater than it had been before and that the level of consumption had therefore increased.

In this climate of increased production, the meaning of landscape imagery changed from what it had previously meant. Before the war, landscape imagery had different meanings depending on how it was produced and its ultimate function. Landscape imagery about specific regions, about the geology of the land and its moods were produced by a variety of artists whose intentions ranged from wanting to provide an accurate description of a region to promoting Australian landscape in England to possible immigrants. The title of Eugene von Guerard’s painting “The Basin Banks about twenty miles south of Mount Elephant” 1857 reads more like a directional instruction than a title of a painting (Bonyhady, p.91). In Bonyhady’s analysis of the value of art, he ascribes value to art in relation to its use as a document and its content in relation to history and landscape painting. Hence von Guerard’s painting represents a work which sets itself the project of providing information about the land.

The period after the war meant that other previous meanings for the landscape were modified and changed due to a changing political, economic and social environment. This was due to changing knowledge of the land. Once the descriptive and documentary knowledge of the land had been achieved and the colony settled, then other forms of knowledge about it were sought. Hence the aim of landscape imagery changes when new contexts and needs develop in society.

After the World War I, the concept of national identity became a new context for imagery because of political developments. The performance of Australian soldiers at the war front resulted in Australia being asked to provide a representative on the War Cabinet in England. This was significant because a political structure had been created which was associated with the securing of national identity. It was an institutional structure for identity which was recognised at home and internationally (Burn, 1988, p.14). This is an important precursor to other developments related to identity in this period.

The context of national identity is further developed in Moore's work from this period which describes changing structural relationships such as the creation of an art boom, artists organisations, public and private
patronage and the dispersal of knowledge about art through publications (*The Necessity of Australian Art*, 1988, p.13). This art boom occurred primarily because of the volume of artwork being commissioned by state institutions as well as the commissioning of war artists; this created a body of work which had an impact on the culture and society due to its volume and status primarily. The increased level of production and consumption of artwork and the associations of war represented in these images meant that the work had symbolic value for all of Australian society (*Burn*, 1991, p.16).

The development of art production on the scale described above was seen as the maturation of a national tradition which Smith discusses in *Place, Taste and Tradition* initially as national sentiment (p.135). This tradition or 'national sentiment' as characterised by Smith began at the end of the 19th century with the Heidelberg School and was the result of their technical accomplishments in creating work showing the uniqueness of Australian light. It established a distinctive genre for Australian imagery which eventually was associated with Australia as a place (*Smith*, 1993, p.125). This association is the groundwork for the idea of a tradition in landscape that had a function and a view of history which can be related to national identity.

The development of art production and the establishment of an art publication industry led to an increased public awareness of art. Consequently landscape imagery could be reproduced for a wider audience. Art reproductions and prints helped establish familiarity of art images in the popular press and other venues and gave it exposure to the wider public. Books such as the 1916 book on Frederick McCubbin (1855-1917) gave detailed information about art to those who were interested in it. Interest in this kind of publication was so intense that the publisher Sydney Ure Smith managed to publish 29 art books in the first eight years of business from 1916 to 1924. Finally the establishment of the magazine *Art in Australia* complemented the visual exposure art that could have in the public forum through the written media.

All of these events helped to establish the position of art as part of economic, political and social institutional structures in society. *Burn* argues that the collective interaction between all structures is indicative of national identity because the social, political and economic values created
by this interaction contribute to the concept of national identity. Burn however acknowledges that he has only examined the main structures related to art and its production in his analysis and refers in passing to other reference material from the period which could be relevant, such as the influence of mass consumerism, manufacturing and advertising.

From these main contexts, the themes of identity and nationalism in the pictorial elements of landscape imagery can be interpreted. Albert Collins' 1883-1951 poster with the heading 'Advertise Australia she's worth it' (Plate 1) uses the landscape within a particular visual code. This poster shows a landscape image of a valley with two trails of smoke coming from homes or campfires in the distance. The colours and treatment of the landscape is somewhat decorative but essentially realistic in their rendering. The message of the landscape as being worthwhile as a cultural possession is quite clearly stated in the words. Familiar landscape forms such as mountains, gum trees, the warm yellows, reds and cool blues typical of many regions of Australia are included in this image. It is an image which presents the landscape as a symbol of colonised and domesticated Australia. Its message informs us of its value. As an example of an iconic form, it visually engages the viewer in the image and inscribes value to that image directly through its text. The development of the iconic form in art imagery also developed in this period between the wars and in the Heidelberg School.

The development of the iconic form began with different interpretations of landscape imagery after the first world war. Burn suggests that regional imagery evolved to mean the "idea" of Australia at this time (Burn, 1991, p.91). George Lambert's *Anzac, the landing* (1918-1922) is an example of how this shift in values occurred (Plate 2). It is a painting of a war event which occurred in 1915 but was painted in the interwar period that Burn is examining. In it the landscape is presented in a naturalistic style in colours which are evocative of the Australian landscape. The actual positioning of the soldiers clambering up the hill is a heroic realist composition emblemmising the heroics of the war. The content of this picture was a visual symbol for national achievement in the context of an international event. The use of the landscape is important in terms of its descriptive content and is also significant because of its similarity to Australian landscape in the period. The background horizon of hills in pale blue, pink and purple are particularly evocative of the hills in the
paintings of Arthur Streeton (1867-1943), Hans Heysen (1877-1968) and other local works of Lambert himself. Hence the implied idea of conquering the land, the symbolism of the event depicted in the painting and the interpretation of the landscape in it can be considered a step in the use of the landscape to emblemise identity. The naturalistic painting elements depicts values and meanings which were implicitly related to the heroics of war and Australia’s role in it.

This kind of symbolic value was then carried over to work which dealt with landscape elements only. Arthur Streeton’s ‘The Land of the Golden Fleece’ (1926) is an example for this analysis (Plate 3). Burn justifies the relevance and importance of this image by referring first of all to its popularity and its reproductions (Burn et al., 1991, p.20) It therefore is relevant because of its overall impact on society and culture through its penetration in the market. This image, which depicts a pastoral area of the Grampians as well as the hills of this particular region is a style that is recognisable for those who knew the area. In its choice of title and its pictorial organisation, Burn et al. argues that it is aiming for "symbolic meaning within a national context" (Burn et al., 1991, p.21). The picture is divided in half with an horizon line in the centre. What is above the horizon line are the hills of the Grampians representing "nature". Below the horizon line the pastures of grazing sheep represent the "civilised" nature. The device of the centred horizon line involves the viewer in the picture that brings about "a self-conscious identification with the landscape" (Burn, 1991, p. 21) In this image, Burn et al. states that there is no hierarchy in the pictorial elements presented and that one sees the image as a Gestalt. Its coherence in relation to Gestalt for Burn is why it achieves the status of an "iconic form".

This interpretation is arrived at through an examination of the subject matter and the arrangement of pictorial elements in this work. The absence of figures in this image is an important compositional strategy to involve the viewer in a more direct identification with the landscape alone. Landscape is thus read as a pure visual form or icon. The power of the icon had to do with a "symbolism which is displaced on the landscape" (Burn, 1991, p.80). By doing this Burn et al. characterises the landscape as non-gendered icon as well. He therefore cannot be accused of creating a gendered symbol of identity (Schaffer, 1988, p.30) or a national Australian type (White, 1981, p.64).
Burn also suggests that the audience of the 1920’s or 30’s may have interpreted this image as a symbol representing the reasons for fighting the war, as a symbol for man’s struggle with nature and the land or a metaphor for the history and future of Australia. Overall whatever interpretation one uses for relating to this image the notion of culture is described by Burn et al in this way:

The conditions for apprehending these uses were dependent upon a cohesiveness of the culture, in this case produced by the individual constituted collectively as part of a nation and in relation to a complex expression of belonging ‘to the land’. They affirm a range of socially constructed (non-material) needs of the regional culture. (Burn, 1991, p.22)

In conclusion, Burn et al construct the idea of identity and culture through a specific procedure or methodology. This involves the selection of relevant historical texts from a time period that has been specified. From these texts and the imagery of the period, a system of signification is arrived at by considering social, political and economic events of the period. This system of signification does not come from facts alone but by looking at an ordered set of values. This system of values and signification becomes the meeting ground for the concept of culture and identity.

Hence landscape imagery in this context is an iconic form by involving the viewer in values or symbols of national identity. These values have been created by artists and art practice and are reinforced by the production and consumption of that imagery in the market. However, since both landscape imagery and the values surrounding it are diverse, culture and identity are not necessarily fixed in any way. The historical forms used in this kind of analysis constantly change in relation to time periods as well and since not all forms can be considered at one time, the nature of culture and identity is that of changing orders. While an ordered value system can be constructed within a particular time period, in reality any value system is changeable and in flux.
Section 4 - The Critique of Identity and Culture

This section examines Anne Marie Willis' *Illusions of Identity* and her understanding of Australian identity and culture. Her analysis is a critique of the commonly held ideas of culture and identity; it is a deconstruction rather than a construction of these ideas. By interrogating what the essence of culture and identity has been and what it could be, she opens up new possibilities and new parameters for the meaning of culture and identity. In relation to the previous analysis, it is a very different approach to the idea of identity and culture.

Willis presents a view of identity and culture which is changeable. It is a conceptualisation where the meaning of identity and culture floats between historical, cultural and literary ideas and continues to do so because the nature of perception is such that new meanings and other ways of thinking are always being created and re-created. For Willis, new meanings sometimes occur in the slippage between known mythologies and emerging and as yet unspecified mythologies.

The construction of nation for Willis is changeable and is based on many different reference points. For example, is nation a concrete entity referring to a political unit or is it an abstract notion referring to set of common goals or feelings? (Willis, *Illusions of Identity*, p.14) Australia as a bounded geographical space is physical reality that is a series of shifting signs, vacillating between the convention of a land mass surrounded by water and the multifarious forms that are evident in Landsat photographs (Willis p.15) Hence for Willis, because the physicality of a place or region can have different frames of reference, the idea of nation can have many meanings.

It follows that the reading of signs of nations exemplified in culture and identity should not be viewed as fixed. They are based on a broad network of cultural conventions, assumptions and images. Willis, in contrast to Burn, analyses images from popular culture as well as art imagery. For example, a postcard map of Australia containing kangaroos, emus, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, Ayers Rock, etc. can be viewed as examples of icons chosen from the discourses of tourism and national identity. These icons must serve the double purpose of promoting a nice place to visit as well as being distinct items representing Australia.
Underlying these two functions are assumptions by the designer about the appropriateness of these symbols to represent 'the nation'. (Willis p. 17). The designer chooses a set of symbols in relation to a design brief or function. A visual symbol however does not represent a single idea because in a different context, it could have another meaning. Hence for Willis, no symbol or icon can represent a single idea.

For Willis, visual imagery in the arts functions in culture in a diverse way. It is essentially a mechanism for the production of appearances for national identities. The visual arts manufactures identity by producing work that deals with subject matter that is read as "national". It also promotes national culture by developing works distinct to a particular culture which are not related to works from a pre-nation past. This is a requirement for the idea of modern nationhood (Willis p.27).

One of the dominant mythologies for Willis is the idea of landscape and nature as the foundation of national identity. Willis sets out the reasons for this in the following way. The first is the psychological appeal of the landscape and man's need to belong to it. This is conflated with the 'discovery' of it and the idea that the identity of the nation is embodied within it. Nature and the landscape is imbued with the idea of the unquestionable truth, an essence of culture. Willis argues that this is merely a cultural construction because the history of Australian landscape painting is not one of progressive discovery of the land or the building up of a more accurate picture of it but a series of changing interpretations. This idea is reinforced by Bonyhady in Images in Opposition. His analysis of landscape imagery has been categorised by its function for example landscape imagery can be documentation as opposed to a romantic interpretation of the landscape.

Another type of interpretation of the landscape is its story. The narrative of the landscape starts at the beginning of European settlement in Australia with topographical artists who mapped the land and documented the flora, fauna and inhabitants. This was followed by the convict artists who painted views of the new settlement. Following them were artists such as Watling (1769-?), Martens (1801-78), von Guerard (1811-1901) and Glover (1769-1849) who were trained abroad and developed a European image of Australia. Buvelot developed a transition style between a European vision and a more authentic or real depiction of
Australia. The Heidelberg School artists developed the first "real" Australian style of art. In this historical narrative of landscape work, the style of work is associated with contextual aspects such as the purpose of the artwork, the education of the artists and critical attitudes to the work. This sort of narration is based on the art historical approach of selecting and ordering the images. From this set of ordered images, art historians identify a tradition of landscape painting. Willis does not agree with this approach because for her visual imagery is not continuous, but fragmented and discontinuous. Tradition as a coherent set of images therefore is the invention of the art historian (Willis, 1993, p.65).

The Heidelberg School for Willis is an archetype for the construction of the tradition associated with national identity. The "Australianness" of their work had to do with particular characteristics evident in it. The first was that their work was homogeneous in style and intention and therefore presented an ideal for national identity and culture. This occurred because the Heidelberg artists worked quite closely together and made this their intention. It was therefore no accident that a body of work appeared that was distinct from other landscape work before it. It was also considered to be distinctly Australian in its depiction of light and vegetation and in its use of uniquely Australian subjects such as shearsers and stockman. Hence their style, subject matter and technique were regarded as unique and these characteristics were cited in literature, historical documents and other writings widely as representative of the nationalist discourse.

Willis interrogates this idea of the Heidelberg School as a distinctly Australian style of painting and its connection with identity and culture by the following means. As Willis argues, the realist impressionist style of their work was popular in Europe and in fact was imported by the Heidelberg artists who studied there. In terms of historical narrative she asks why their work is any different from the past work of von Guerard, Martens and Watling in its appropriation of influences from Europe?

Willis also dismisses the proposition that their work depicts the unique qualities of the Australian light. First of all, she views this as erroneous because many other regions of the world have light conditions similar to that depicted in Heidelberg paintings. The sense of light in Heidelberg paintings is perceived as different in relation to Europe so its unique depiction of Australian light is a conclusion which is dependent on
comparison to Europe which for Australia is an opposite. In her opinion
the use of Europe as a point of comparison indicates a essentially
Eurocentric attitude.

The subject matter of Heidelberg paintings is often cited as a symbol
or an icon of national identity. In some texts, the choice of subject matter
is cited as being unique. The originality of the subject matter is
questionable for a variety of reasons. Willis points out that the Heidelberg
artists' use of shearsers and stockmen was subject matter that first appeared
in photography and the illustrated press. It therefore was not an original
subject for the Heidelberg artists although their work is regarded as a
national symbol. Tom Roberts' (1856-1931) painting 'Shearing the Rams'
(Plate 4) for example illustrates this point. As a painting, it poetises the
work of the shearer, an intention that was stated by Roberts in a piece of
writing about the work (Smith, Australian Painting 1788-1990, p.88)
Hence although this subject was made popular first by a 'low art' form, it
is the high art form which is credited with the contribution to national
culture.

The concentration of the Heidelberg artists on certain landforms
over others is also problematic for Willis. For example, she accuses
McCubbin of elevating Macedon, Victoria because it was a subject
suitable for specific stylistic treatment and not because it had any special
qualities. She likens McCubbin's work with what the French artists did
for the forests of the Fountainbleu. She argues that the choice of subject
matter was not always directed towards ideas of national symbols but were
chosen because of the considerations of media, idea, formal concerns and,
in McCubbin's case, a kind of appropriation of European imagery. It was
the choice of style and subject and its position in high art in Europe which
made it acceptable high art in Australia. Underlying Willis' criticism is
the disjunction between what the Heidelberg artists were doing and what
the mythology of identity and culture says they were doing in this case.

She is also critical of the mythology surrounding McCubbin’s, 'The
Pioneer' and 'A Bush Burial' in terms of being related to nationalistic
themes which celebrate the white settlement of Australia. 'A Bush Burial'
was widely praised for its national character and was acquired by the
National Gallery of Victoria in 1906. Willis identifies its nationalistic
appeal as based on its distinctive portrayal of 'bush types'. Stylistically
however this painting was based on English painting and the Barbizon School and therefore was not an image designed to project national culture. This however did not disadvantage its acceptance and in fact aided it.

The nationalism here lies in the notion that it is Australian locales that are capable of inspiring poetic responses, thus the productions of high culture according to European norms is demonstrated to be possible in Australia. (p. 73)

The idea of nation or national identity in this example shows Australia's uniqueness as a place. Its European style however is reflective of the high culture in comparable work done in Europe.

The mythology of the Heidelberg School, the well documented significance of it and its importance in the construction of national identity will be difficult if not impossible to change or debunk. The primary reason for this is the familiarity of these images to particular audiences and their position in historical narrative. What Willis objects to is the prevailing interpretation that this imagery is connected with nationalism (Willis p.84). She questions whether the promotion of specific cultural ideas in landscape imagery should create the development of national consciousness. This also implies that such ideas should be more closely interrogated as creations of art history, literature and myth.

Willis continues this argument by suggesting that the meaning of a work is not the same for each viewer. A Heidelberg painting is going to be perceived by the educated art viewer differently from the uneducated or non-Australian art viewer. In addition, the perception of what is uniquely Australian changes with time. In today's world the image of red rocks is more evocative of something Australian to an international audience than the more obscure Heidelberg images. For Willis, the public's perception is not fixed and is as diverse as the numbers of viewers looking at a work.

Time however does not necessarily change the power of the myth and ideas about national identity. Willis uses the exhibition 'Golden Summers' (1986) as a case study to illustrate the continuing importance of the Heidelberg School and how this was promoted in this exhibition. Willis argues that this exhibition's original objectives were to demythologise the Heidelberg School. However in its catalogue essay and its presentation it
managed to re-mythologise it. As a curatorial strategy, this can be viewed as discourse that is market friendly for audiences who want to see the familiar as well as learn something about the unfamiliar. The final product in this marketing strategy was that the mythologies connected with the Heidelberg School were revised and re-manufactured for today's audiences. In her conclusion, 'Golden Summers' represents the assumption that national culture is a tradition which is projected as a continuity. She suggests that a better way of thinking about this is that landscape imagery is "recycled, re-manufactured and relocated" into contemporary discourses. Due to this phenomena, it will not disappear from the visual narrative of Australia. Its importance may diminish with time but it has a life of its own in national culture. By virtue of its historical roots, it is entrenched in our culture.

In conclusion, Anne Marie Willis interrogates the idea of culture and identity in a variety of ways. From the fundamental starting point of the physical place which is the site of culture and identity, she examines the different ways of conceiving the place known as Australia. The idea of place is not fixed and therefore the reading of signs and symbols representing the place, identity or culture is not fixed. Signs as symbols of culture exist for themselves alone and since they quite often have a purpose in an image, they can have more than one meaning. Certain meanings are chosen over other meanings to create the appearance of national identity and culture. Culture and identity are thus a series of changing concepts produced by a variety of sources.

Landscape imagery has been tied to the mythology of national identity for a variety of reasons. The first is the psychology of people's relation to the land, their possession of it and a sense of belonging. The second is landscape as the narrative of colonisation and settlement of Australia that involves a body of landscape images related to ideas of belonging, etc.

The context of landscape imagery and in particular the Heidelberg School as identified by Willis is the archetype of nationalist discourse due to its style, subject matter and the mythology surrounding it. Willis critiques this as not being necessarily Australian but appropriated from Europe. Aspects of this style such as the sense of light created is also debunked as being characteristic of other parts of the world and not just Australia. The subject matter of these paintings is conventionally
considered uniquely Australian and symbolic of national ideas about ownership of the land, the colonisation of it and life in the bush. In some cases it is the second consideration after formal consideration of style as evidenced in the Barbizon style paintings of McCubbin. Finally the 'Golden Summers' exhibition is accused of recreating the myths of the Heidelberg School for a contemporary audience to market the exhibition.

In summary, Willis' analysis is significant because it creates a critical insight into the processes of art history. However one of the characteristics of Willis' work is that in its critique, it leaves no structure or sense of cohesion in the body of information created in her book, hence the use of the word 'illusion' in the book title is very apt.
Section 5 - The Mythology of Culture and Identity

This section will assess the ideas about culture and identity presented in this paper. The reference point of mythology will be used to give this discussion some cohesion and common reference points. One of the common themes used by Willis and Burn is the idea of a myth and how myth relates to landscape imagery, culture and identity. In *Mythologies*, Barthes describes myth as a system of communication and a mode of signification which can be considered a form. This form has historical limits and conditions of use. Hence myth is a type of speech or a form of discourse (Barthes, p.121). The difference between Willis and Burn can be described as the differences between a social art historical discourse and a cultural history discourse. Burn is involved in the construction of ideas about culture and identity whereas Willis is involved in the project of critiquing and exposing ideas about culture and identity. Burn is involved in the construction of the myth whereas Willis is involved in its deconstruction.

Myth involves the use of semiology in which a signifier is form and a signified is concept. Concept and form create the myth. Both Willis and Burn use a semiological system of signs based on a confined study of objects and texts. Willis, in contrast, uses semiology to critique forms and to ascribe possible new meanings to forms. Her use of this kind of analysis is not as cohesive as Burn because it is based on ideas about culture which are diverse.

Mythology has cohesion, however its concepts are not fixed and they can be altered or changed completely (Barthes, p.130). Burn *et al* describe a system of values or concepts in this respect. These values are open to change even though there is sense of cohesion in his work which can be regarded by some as fixed. By acknowledging that he uses a restricted set of sources and not other texts, he is aware that other conclusions also exist outside the one he may be making. His study is an examination of relevant objects (art images) and the relevant texts from a particular period. In doing this, he is constructing a body of information this is quantitatively oriented to the selected time period which can investigate values in this period intensively. Using this approach however can never be thorough because there will always be information and data outside the confines of any study.
In contrast, the cohesion in Willis' work is her choice of objects in her analysis. It is a body of objects and texts that represent cultural ideas. However as objects from low and high culture, marginalised groups, etc. it is not a category of objects and not a cohesive body of information. Given that they both are using different reference material, it is not surprising that their attitudes to culture and identity and their methods of analysis are very different.

Burn's body of information describing the social, economic and political structures become the context for the images that he assesses. For example, his analysis of 'The Land of the Golden Fleece' relates to the visual structure of the image to the concept of iconic form. This is a conclusion arrived at by assessing the idea of Gestalt in the image which is a pictorial idea. Once he has established that the image has a visual impact, then he assigns possible value to it having to do with social and political contexts. i.e. The viewer might see the landscape as a symbol of what the war was about. In the image 'Anzac the Landing', he can interpret the symbolism directly because it is a descriptive and explicit image.

In both these cases, Burn et al.'s assessment of these images has to do with the idea of giving these images a meaning and a value which is substantiated by its environment. The assessment in Burn et al. is documented in primary sources of the period in letters and articles by Smith (Documents on Art and Taste in Australia 1770-1914, p.230-277). When Smith discusses Robert's intention in the painting 'Shearing the Rams' this becomes part of the context which gives the imagery meaning. In addition to this, an image is validated in culture by its reproduction in books, magazines, its acquisitions by a state or regional gallery and by the commercial success of the artist who is making the objects. The context of the work is assessed in relation to the local or Australian environment.

In contrast, Willis discusses a disparate body of Australian images and relates them to psychology and other visual cultures. This leads her to different conclusions about what the imagery ultimately means in culture. For her, visual imagery in culture represents and manufactures the appearance of national identity. Some of these appearances have to do with the psychology of needing to belong to the landscape or the need to
possess it. Other appearances are related to the narrative of the landscape, the conquering of it, the descriptive documentation of it, etc. Other imagery such as the postcard example use historical and contemporary symbols of the landscape for the purpose of presenting Australian identity. Willis uses this diverse range of examples to discuss the various ways the landscape has been used in history. She does not however order these images and make any conclusion about the landscape representing culture. She in fact attacks the methodology of classifying and ordering images as well as the idea that nature and land represent the essence of culture. The idea that landscape and nature is the foundation of national identity is regarded as a mythology by her. For Willis, culture and identity is a continual process of understanding.

In contrast, Burn views culture as a expressed relationship to the land. What Burn means by this is the idea of possessing and belonging to the land which is considered the psychology of the land for Willis. The emphasis on this idea is shifted from being the central idea to a peripheral idea in Willis. However the degree of difference between the two is not as great as it seems. In Burn's view of culture as an expressed relationship, this can mean a variety of relationships having to do with the historical or visual forms one is examining. It is a position which is not vastly different from Willis in this respect. Both seem to imply that culture and identity are ideas which are changeable and that they are ultimately created mythologies.
Section 6 - ‘The Artists of Hill End’ Exhibition: New Foundations of Identity

‘The Artists of Hill End’ (1995) exhibition is a good case study for some of the ideas and themes presented in this paper. As an exhibition created from certain ideas, it represents a new discourse in identity and culture. Hence every aspect of this exhibition in some way exemplifies aspects of Burn et al’s and Willis’ ideas about the relationship of art imagery to culture and identity. In fact, one might suspect that the concept of the exhibition has been structured around art historical discourses and that the work has been found to fit into the discourse. Hence in this section aspects of the exhibition will be evaluated in relation to the ideas presented so far.

As a body of landscape work from Hill End and Sofala by artists from three different generations, it is a unique selection of work. Due to the length of time period chosen, there are many stylistic variations in the work so unlike the work of the Heidelberg School, it cannot be homogenous. Since homogeneity cannot be the criteria for selection, the curator Gavin Wilson uses historical narrative to validate its selection. As a story, it is one that has a strong historical narrative of a boom mining town which attracted a variety of gold seekers from all over the world. This meant that the land was mined and degraded. The area was urbanised very quickly and then abandoned when there was no more gold. As a region, it is at the other end of spectrum from the pastoral idyll depicted in Heidelberg paintings. As a symbol of identity and culture is therefore able to depict new knowledge about the landscape such as the harshness of it and its ugliness.

The artists of Hill End were interested in a variety of forms of expression. They were neither realists or naturalists but rather artists influenced by Modernism who used the area as subject matter for a variety of visual ideas and styles. This meant that they all balanced the use of an indigenous region against the broader concerns of the Modernist philosophy. Whether it be Surrealist oriented work from Drysdale in 'Man Reading a Newspaper' (1941) or Donald Friend's abstract 'Hill End Landscape' (1951), the use of title, colour and landforms distinguish the work as belonging to a type of landscape or a region. Hence a common
landform is being used to create a visible group of paintings or objects so that ideas about its meaning or value can be created.

To this end "The Artists of Hill End" exhibition categorises and identifies a body of work that might otherwise not be associated as belonging together. This is described by Gavin Wilson, the curator of the exhibition as the beginning of a vernacular modernism which is a term used and defined by Burn in National Life and Landscape.

Since the 1930's, in many countries at the margins of the modernist world, these styles have contributed to the development of nationally oriented modernist vernaculars. In the absence of a definition, a modernist vernacular might be said to be an expression assembled within a modernist idiom, part of whose meaning is specific and private to a particular cultural environment and hence not directly through the international milieu of the modern movements. It seems, then that expressionism and surrealism, premised in some ways as the expression of inner feelings and subjective sensations rather than the codification of a universal order could carry national feeling as readily as individual feeling. (p. 204)

The categorisation and identification of the Hill End work as a vernacular modernism further advances the idea of nationalism in this way. By insisting on the idea that the work has an indigenous quality as evidenced by the region which is shared, it is insisting on its difference from others, its uniqueness and therefore its nationality. Even though the work also has the concerns of international modernism in its interest, it still retains an essential Australian character.

Its essential Australianness has to do with the recycling of some the themes of Burn and Willis' work. It is a grouping of objects that has a historical narrative attached to it having to do with man's relation to the land in this case an area that is significant because of gold rather than the homogeneity of the work produced there. As a category of art historical study it is not a time-based grouping of objects but a disparate grouping of
objects which is related in theme as in Willis’ methods. Since site is the
only common ground the conclusions about the work cannot be made,
however values and ideas about identity can be alluded to. Much of the
catalogue essay is anecdotal evidence which is similar to Moore’s *The
Story of Australian Art* rather than the analysis in Willis’ and Burn’s
work.

This exhibition has been validated through the support of a variety of
institutions as evidenced in the exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South
Wales (1995) and other regional galleries hosting this exhibition. In
addition to this the National Parks and Wildlife Service and other heritage
organisations have committed themselves to the preservation and
management of the Hill End site and an artist in residency program. Hill
End as site has become an icon. As an icon, it becomes a site to relive and
remember the work of the artists who have been and gone. Through its
artist in residence program it promotes this idea as well as the work of
contemporary artists who have been selected to work there. As a structure
or idea, it has become a determinant which is creating and giving this body
of work value now and will continue to do so in the future. Hence this
exhibition is an example of Burn’s ideas of economic, political and social
structures creating and giving artwork value in culture. Without the
support of National Parks, the art gallery and heritage organisations, the
finance needed to support this groups of work and site would not exist.
The support of these non-art organisations give the site and the work other
values aside from art values because these values become related to the
work.

As an exhibition curated from these ideas, it can be criticised in the
following way. Most of the work in the exhibition is only related to Hill
End by circumstances rather than representing the main oeuvre of the artist
involved. The fact that Hill End attracted a number of well known artists
is also circumstantial. Hence the status of the exhibition’s work is
artificially is elevated by the current status of the artists represented rather
than myth of Hill End and its potential to inspire artists. In some instances,
the work is quite weak and its inclusion in the exhibition has to do with the
standing of the artist rather than the quality of the work (i.e. Brett
Whiteley’s ‘Hill End’).
The psychology of this exhibition is not unlike the ‘Golden Summers’ exhibition. As an exercise in marketing the familiar and the unfamiliar, the myth of identity and culture has been successfully consumed by the public and will continue to do so as it tours other parts of Australia. Hence in a new context ideas about identity and culture have been constructed into a myth for the Australian public.

Aspects of this myth can be illustrated by examining some of the key images and artists of this exhibition. In contrast, to the pastoral qualities of Heidelberg imagery, the Hill End imagery exposed the landscape as harsh, alien and degraded. The realities and the hardships of the land and its true qualities such as its dryness were depicted in colours and compositions which reflected these characteristics. The use of Surrealism, Expressionism and Romanticism as stylistic devices further advanced the visual vocabulary the artists of this group used in expressing these ideas.

Russell Drysdale’s (1912-1981) ‘Man Reading a Newspaper’ (1941) depicts the landscape as flat and barren with leafless trees. The foreground has objects of human occupation such as scrap metal. On the horizon the silhouettes of windmills and water towers dominate reminding us of man’s use of the land. In the middle of this a man sits reading a newspaper. The man is indifferent to what is around him and the landscape is hot and uninviting. Both are alienated from each other. As an image of identity, this reads as the binary opposite to the images of Heidelberg School. Instead of evoking the idea of belonging to the land, it evokes the idea of alienation. The landscape is not a lush pastoral ideal but a harsh barren desert. The figure is not harmony with living in the bush as the bushman in McCubbin’s ‘The Pioneer’ rather it indicates man’s disharmony with the land and his destruction of it. The use of expressive devices in the depiction of the stick figure against the Surrealist rendering of the landscape is an interesting juxtaposition of these styles to create this message.

Drysdale’s ‘Woman in a Landscape’ is an interesting metaphor for the qualities of the landscape. The face of the woman shows the hardship of the land and her size suggests the physical toil of survival on the land. The solitary nature of the land and existence on it is suggested by the single set of dwellings in the background set against a drought stricken land and sky. As a painting, it is not attractive as a conventional
composition. However its expressive qualities and monumentality attracted attention at this time. This was evident in its winning the Melrose Prize in 1949, its subsequent acquisition by the Art Gallery of South Australia and the controversy over its acquisition by the critics at this time. As an early painting from Hill End, it was a precursor for further works which were popular with the public.

Drysdale’s ‘The Cricketers’ is an example of this (Plate 5). "Over the decades, it has achieved the status of a cherished national icon and is one the most frequently reproduced paintings in Australian art." (Wilson, p.61) By relating the mass production of the image and the public’s familiarity with it, Wilson implies that the status of icon is achieved through these means. The values in the image such as national culture as represented by cricket in the regional context of Hill End are suggested in this image’s subject matter. Certainly the game of cricket is an assessable and obvious symbol to many Australians. By associating this image with the concept of national icon, Wilson, like Burn, gives this image a value in culture. However unlike Burn, Wilson gives this image its iconic status based on its popularity. He does not analyse the content of this image and how it relates to other imagery of the period. He assumes that its popularity gives it value in Australian culture.

The works in this exhibition represent a mixture of different styles and intentions. The spiritual is represented in Donald Friend’s (1915-1989) ‘The Apocalypse of St. John the Divine’ 1949. The abstraction of the landscape is represented in the work of John Firth Smith and John Olsen. Finally Brett Whiteley’s landscapes represent a swing back to the figurative. The diversity of the imagery presented from this region enhances the power of the site of Hill End. It suggests that this site was and still is capable of producing insightful, powerful and diverse inspiration for a variety of artists. In addition, there is also an implicit assumption that the landscape is typically Australian in all of these images.

In summary, the myth of Hill End has been created through a regional historical narrative. The Gold Rush, its boom and its decline is an historical event that occurred in many towns throughout Australia. This site because it was where gold was found, has a special value in culture. From this circumstance, the work created at this site is given value and in some cases given value over other work that the artist has done somewhere.
else. However Hill End is unique because it attracted a group of artists which created a body of work. Stylistically varied and diverse, this work represents the landscape in opposition to Heidelberg images and in doing so creates a new relationship with the land. The struggle with the land and its adversity is a new view of man’s relationship to the land. The use of symbols and metaphors for this relationship broadens the visual vocabulary from which ideas about culture and identity can be constructed.

As a myth the site of Hill End is ongoing. Its preservation as a heritage site means that it has become a national icon of past artistic achievements. Current and future art will continue with the present and future achievements of artists participating in its artist in residency program. As a collection of objects, it will continue to grow and have value in Australian culture. As different artists participate in its program, each will contribute their own work to this body of artwork. However in the future will this groups of objects have any cohesion apart from the site and will it create ideas of identity and culture?
Section 7 - Conclusion

This paper has examined the argument that Australian culture and identity in landscape imagery is an historical and visual construction or discourse. In Burn et al’s work a discourse has been configured with the use of primary and secondary historical sources. This work however does not set out specifically what culture and identity is but abstractly sets out values in culture and identity. These values are not necessarily fixed but because they are determined by material events such as the artwork, the artists and market. The parameters of interpretation are also set by a time period. By considering all these factors, Burn et al are able to establish the idea of iconic form and symbols. These forms and symbols represent identity and culture because they have a meaning related to identity and culture. However because visual signs have different meanings in different contexts, these symbols and forms are not necessarily indicative of anything specific in identity and culture but merely represent values. Burn’s discourse is a foundation discourse which is linear because it is based on a time period and material realities.

In contrast, Willis’ work does examine material realities but ideas and discourses about identity and culture. Since she does not agree with art history methods, she uses different information to formulate her ideas. Hence the kind of information she uses is much broader and is not time based. By critiquing dominant mythologies and discourse in art history she reveals other information about culture and identity. By exposing the underlying assumptions made by art historians, she exposes aspects of culture and identity such as how we might determine it in terms of land mass and boundaries. Since her work exists in the land of ideas, the nature of identity and culture is suggested but never clearly expressed.

Finally ‘The Artists of Hill End’ exhibition illustrates how the work of Burn and Willis combine to create a new discourse in identity and culture. As a new exhibition, it shows how the historical ideas and values can be recycled and relocated into a new group of art objects. Ultimately culture and identity is a construct of these discourses and new narratives that are created. Since we cannot escape our past, they will always be related to older narratives of the land. Hence as new narratives develop about how we live on the land, new illusions of identity in relation to the land will emerge as a mirror of this narrative.
Plate 1
Albert Collins (1883-1951)
Advertise Australia Poster (1924)
Plate 2
George Lambert (1873-1930)
Anzac, the landing 1915 (1918-22)
Plate 3
Arthur Streeton (1867-1943)
The land of the golden fleece (1926)
Plate 4
Tom Roberts (1856-1931)
Shearing the Rams (1890)
Plate 5
Russell Drysdale (1912-1981)
The Cricketers (1948)
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Australian Landscape: Its Relationship to Culture and Identity

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M (Honours) Visual Arts
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Summary

This paper is an examination of the relationship of Australian landscape imagery to culture and identity. Visual and historical ideas in the Heidelberg School and more contemporary landscape work is assessed in relation to social history in the work of Ian Burn et al and the social history in the work of Anne Marie Willis. These two types of history are compared and conclusions are made about their similarities and differences in the articulation of identity and culture. It will be concluded that identity and culture are ideas and values which are recycled and relocated with the passage of time and that certain central themes reoccur in the construction of identity and culture.

Certificate

This is to certify that this work or any part of this work has not been submitted for a higher degree at another institution.

Signature of Candidate
Acknowledgments

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