

# RAYMOND MOULT-SPIERS

## PART 3 : THE ARTIST ON STRADBROKE ISLAND

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By 1957 RAYMOND MOULT-SPIERS was back from his skirmish working at the Walt Disney studios. His paintings were again receiving press as evidenced in a cutting from a local Fairfield newspaper article dated January 5th 1957, which discussed his work and announced he had been studying painting overseas.

And in 1957 he participated in a two-person show with up and coming Melbourne artist Ronald Kirk at the Dominion Galleries in Castlereagh Street, Sydney, a gallery known to exhibit some of the country's top artists. Raymond was indeed back. He also exhibited with a group of five young contemporary artists in a show which was very much 'anti-art school' and anti 'school of thought'.

*Molt-Spiers claimed that during the war it was out of necessity that he painted with brushes fashioned from bamboo and human hair, using pigments made from clays, metals, dyes and human blood.*

*River Park France, oil and wax  
on board 192x85cm, c1957  
Private collection*

*This painting explores the  
difference in light in France  
captured on his trip back  
from the USA*

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long, sweeping tail.

They wanted their freedom and so the show was taken to the people. In a Dadaist act, it was held in the unusual location of the CWA Rest Rooms, Fairfield.

A newspaper review claimed:

'There is more humanity ----- and kinship with humanity ----- to be seen in this small exhibition than is likely to be seen in a multitude of art galleries and exhibitions arranged by those who profess to know what life is all about and tag it with an 'ism' or an 'ist'. The art critic Evelyn Walters discussed Ray's work with reference to his brief 1956 sojourn in Paris as evidenced in his paintings. Walters wrote: 'Most prolific exhibitor is Ray Moultspiers, whose compelling work includes some done locally as well as some he painted while abroad last year. This

*Three Pagoda Pass*; oil on paper,  
25x20, c1980s,  
Private collection

imaginative artist varies between strongly dramatic contrasting paintings and contrasting misty paintings which nevertheless emphasise appropriate treatment (note no. 26, 'Loch Duich'), while the second is best expressed in 'Summertime', with its delightful fantasy.'

In 1959 two other ex POWs, both artists like himself from the City of Parramatta Art Society, joined with Moultspiers in another deliberate Dadaist act. They contrived to take their work out of the gallery environment to display it to the people, roadside. Like renegade artists from the frontline these three attracted a crowd and the press. In an ensuing 1959 newspaper article about the 'road show', entitled 'Blood for Paint', Moultspiers claimed that during the war it was out of necessity that he painted with brushes fashioned from bamboo and human hair; using pigments made from clays, metals, dyes and human blood.



*Ray Moultspiers*



Raymond Mout-Spiers preparing for the 1959 Road Show, an exhibition he and two other ex POWs took out of the gallery environs and to the people. His absurdist wit at play: "AT FIRST I PAINTED FOR ME ----- NO RETURNS. NEXT I PAINTED FOR PEANUTS ----- BETTER". Private collection

A handwritten signature or initials in black ink, located in the bottom right corner of the page.

In 1961 Moults-Spiers won the Parramatta Art Prize with his painting entitled *The Mourners*, purchased by the Parramatta City Council, and now in the City of Parramatta Cultural Collections. In 1962 he won the Parramatta Contemporary Art Prize. This recognition and being a foundation member of the Parramatta Art Society led the way to involvement in other art groups. He was on the executive committee of the prominent and progressive Australia Art Associates, the biggest nationwide organisation for modern painters, architects, sculptors, designers and creators in plastic arts. Australia Art Associates was the first of its kind to address the need for touring original works of art to all major centres throughout Australia. The Cumberland Argus picked up the story on May 9th, 1962 and in bold text cited artist Raymond Moults-Spiers, winner of Parramatta Council's special Contemporary Art Award as one of the executives on Australia Art Associates, described as the largest arts organisation in the Commonwealth.

*Wild Horses*; oil and wax on board, 60 x 90cm, c1960s (exhibited again in 1962)  
Location unknown

Moults-Spiers held a two-person show in 1964, with Collinridge Rivett who was secretary of Australia Art Associates. The exhibition, at the Penthouse Gallery, Church Street, Parramatta, was opened by David McMillan, the University of Sydney Archivist. Proceeds went to the International House Appeal in aid of multicultural understanding and acceptance, an initiative of both the University of NSW and the University of Sydney. The review described Moults-Spiers as being 'recognised as one of Australia's most creative and original contemporary painters'.

Ray's interest in taking elitism out of the arts and inspiring people to reach for their own creative expression stayed with him all his life. He appears to have travelled extensively, enthusiastically moving about his district and interstate, entering art prizes for the purpose of promoting and fostering an appreciation of the arts. He wanted art to be available to everyone and with an open heart encouraged emerging artists of all ages to develop their skills.

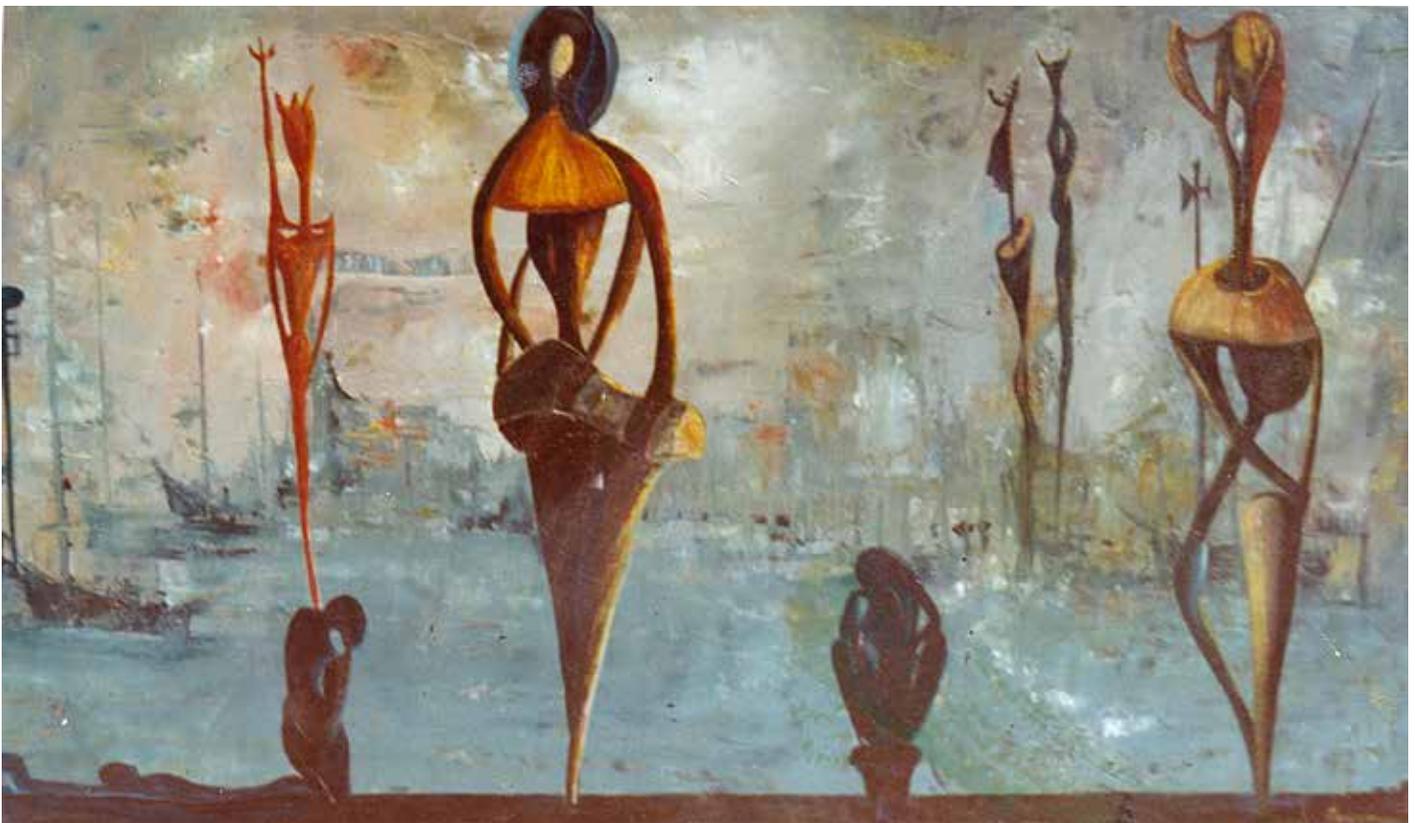
The essence of this practice was certainly set within his co-founded City of Parramatta Art Society from





Above:  
*Roo Country*; oil and wax on board,  
46x90cm, c1960s, Private collection

Below:  
*Surreal figures at the River*, size, title and  
medium unknown, c1960s,  
Location unknown



its inception, perhaps eclipsing Raymond's bigger view of sharing the arts nationwide through *Australia Art Associates*.

Artist Ambrose Reisch encountered Raymond Moul-Spiers during the late 1960s, the then 16 year-old Reisch recalled the air of anticipation as he sat in a meeting of the Cabramatta Art Society while Moul-Spiers was sliding and pulling his large painting down the passage, finally dragging it into the meeting room. According to Reisch, before Ray started to speak 'you could hear a pin drop'.

'That's where I first met Ray Moul-Spiers', says Reisch, who tells how at that meeting Moul-Spiers became the inspiration which swung his choice to pursue a career as an artist ... and a successful one at that, crisscrossing between Australian and international art worlds, and including lecturing at the National Art School in Sydney.

*The Race*; oil on composition board,  
61x90.5cm. c1960s,  
Location unknown

For Reisch it was Ray's referencing of literature along with the intensity he stirred which captivated him. He frames Moul-Spiers as 'debonair' when he stood to speak with cigarette in hand describing the background to his painting as being set on a south coast beach. Moul-Spiers professed befriending another artist who was also working on that beach. That artist was Brett Whiteley who Moul-Spiers depicted next to a carved lectern on which lay an open book with the word 'Baudelaire' written across it.

Reisch said: 'That was for me at sixteen, a seminal experience.'

Apparently Ray Moul-Spiers enhanced this story with effect, causing an eruption of gasps throughout the room when he recounted how Brett Whiteley had also used blood in his painting - albeit shark's blood. Reisch acknowledges it was 'very theatrical but Ray brought a lot of excitement to the meetings'.

Reisch recalled a later visit to Moul-Spiers' Horsley Park studio: 'For my youthful experience, the studio



*OR*

was filled with mythical magic. The artist, the thinker, the dreamer evident everywhere. Now that I cast my forensic eye over that experience I feel I am right. Ray was not a production artist, on the art treadmill, but more a romantic artist, enacting his forays into the surrealism of his experiences.

'These are, of course, my impressions from the time. In conversation he was interested in the surrealists but, more importantly, in the poetry of art.'

In 1970 Ray, who was only 50, resigned his post as Horsley Park postmaster and with his wife Elma went to live on North Stradbroke Island. Here his passion for big old American cars and collectables grew. He set up a studio and carried on working, entering prizes and selling his work through various art galleries in Sydney. In 1972 he held a solo show at the Penthouse Gallery in Parramatta.

Sadly, Elma passed away in 1977, leaving Raymond to reinvent himself, slowly becoming a recluse.

*The Mourners*; oil on board, 60x90cm (1961  
Parramatta Art Society Contemporary Art Award).  
City of Parramatta Cultural Collections

### Moult-Spiers' North Stradbroke Island Studio 1977-95

*I am indebted to Ray's daughter for the material on which the following is based.*

When anyone arrived at the island studio it induced piercing screams from a gaggle of geese. Like car horns tooting at a country football match, they announced the approach. These poultry creatures wouldn't shut up. Standing on the cobbled path at the edge of the property, gazing down at the crazy paving indicated Ray's tendency to collage, to manage chaos. There was a garage in front, on the lean, held up by an oversized American car, the Buick Continental within.

The path split a course between the shrieking geese on the left and the silent sheds on the right. The tangled garden fringing the man-made structures attempted to warn of the idiosyncratic occupant. The house, at the path's end, was covered in an appliqué of found objects, discarded perhaps? He would be there at the door holding a live rabbit, illegal vermin on the island. Once inside, the reveal was a few small rooms, all littered with strategically layered keepsakes hiding oversized furniture. He,





*Kapok Tree*; paint on card, 21x14cm, c1990s,  
Private collection

the occupant, slept in the second room but its entrance was set like a rat trap, with a huge block of timber teetering from the slightly ajar door to the door jamb. Should anyone make the mistake of pushing the door open, even slightly, they would find themselves (or at the very least, their toe) crushed by this massive timber trap. All this invited the question: what had happened to this man that he needed his sleeping quarters protected thus? The house was a wonderland of half-completed projects. One would be wrong to presume its occupant was only interested in repairing white goods. Casting an eye about, his interest in art was evident, only to be pipped at the post by the collectables and antiques. Plants and wild life clambered for position amid anti-social slogans and pictures of UFOs. Kept newspapers attempted to meet the ceiling in places, guarding his keen interest in not-so-current affairs and politics.

The backyard spilled over into the bush and down to the swamp, where a massive bright red London double decker bus could be mistaken for a monster

A stylized, handwritten signature or mark in black ink, consisting of a few sweeping, connected strokes.

from the everglades and which, not unlike Dr Who's Tardis, appeared to have landed at a random intergalactic location. But instead of a police box full of deceptive space, the bus was packed tight with more valued objects. Electrical devices, long deceased, were kept as decoys all around the garden. Perhaps this smorgasbord of items, there for the taking, was a distraction, an offering to any would-be robber? Everywhere there were too many TVs, like useless plastic ducks on a pond; decoys all, attracting more of the same.

Amongst all this, but on the outer edge, was his studio, an arbour leading the way in. It was constructed from bush poles, scarcely supporting the vine and carpet snake there, the slabs under it covered in a mat of skin and leaves. A glass door exposed the contents - more colour now. Palettes and brushes lying waiting where they were left, surrounded by every type of tube, tub and tin of paint available. The place where art was made, his collages constructed onto misshapen boards, with paint taking the eye into a deeper dimension.

Paintings were done on anything that could support application; easels gathered together and, standing firm, would hold these images up. Enthusiasm apparent; creativity showing in surges. The walls were reinforced by shelves of all kinds and filled with a range of objects, apparatus and nature yields, all ready for their moment, the possibility of being selected and dropped into a pool of wet paint. Set about him in the tiered auditorium, the clutter would have been his audience, his witness to his acts of creativity and musings.

Raymond Moul-Spiers maintained his expansive, ever-increasing eclectic creative interests all his days on Stradbroke. His studio: a treasury, a potpourri, a compendium of how his mind worked; a place of excitement and wonderment, of ideas yet to be realised, right up until his untimely mysterious death in 1995.

*Thirty Knots*; oil on paper, 21x14cm. c1980s  
Private collection

Driving his big old American cars on Stradbroke set him apart but when the druggies came to the island in the 80s he was occasionally robbed and beaten. These events began to re-shape his reasons for doing things. He began to litter the yard with his decoy white goods. But the most stunning of his decisions was when he took to wearing a pair of colt revolvers, while stating in his letters that he had converted his wealth to gold which he now wore in a money belt.

In 1995, the echoes of WW2 swirled around him as the 50 years since its conclusion was commemorated. That same year, war biographer Ron Mumford noted in his research that he was concerned for Raymond's mental state, while some of Stradbroke's inhabitants began to see Raymond as a 'pest'. According to them he had been firing his colts menacingly, and so the police sensibly confiscated his guns, perhaps leaving him vulnerable.

Ray's body was found in July of '95. According to locals the island's big flesh-eating monitor lizards had



found him first. Noted too was that he had been robbed. Officially it was declared he had passed away from a heart attack. The robbery was left unsolved and it seems no further investigation took place. To the distant onlooker none of these indications bring a satisfactory conclusion to his end.

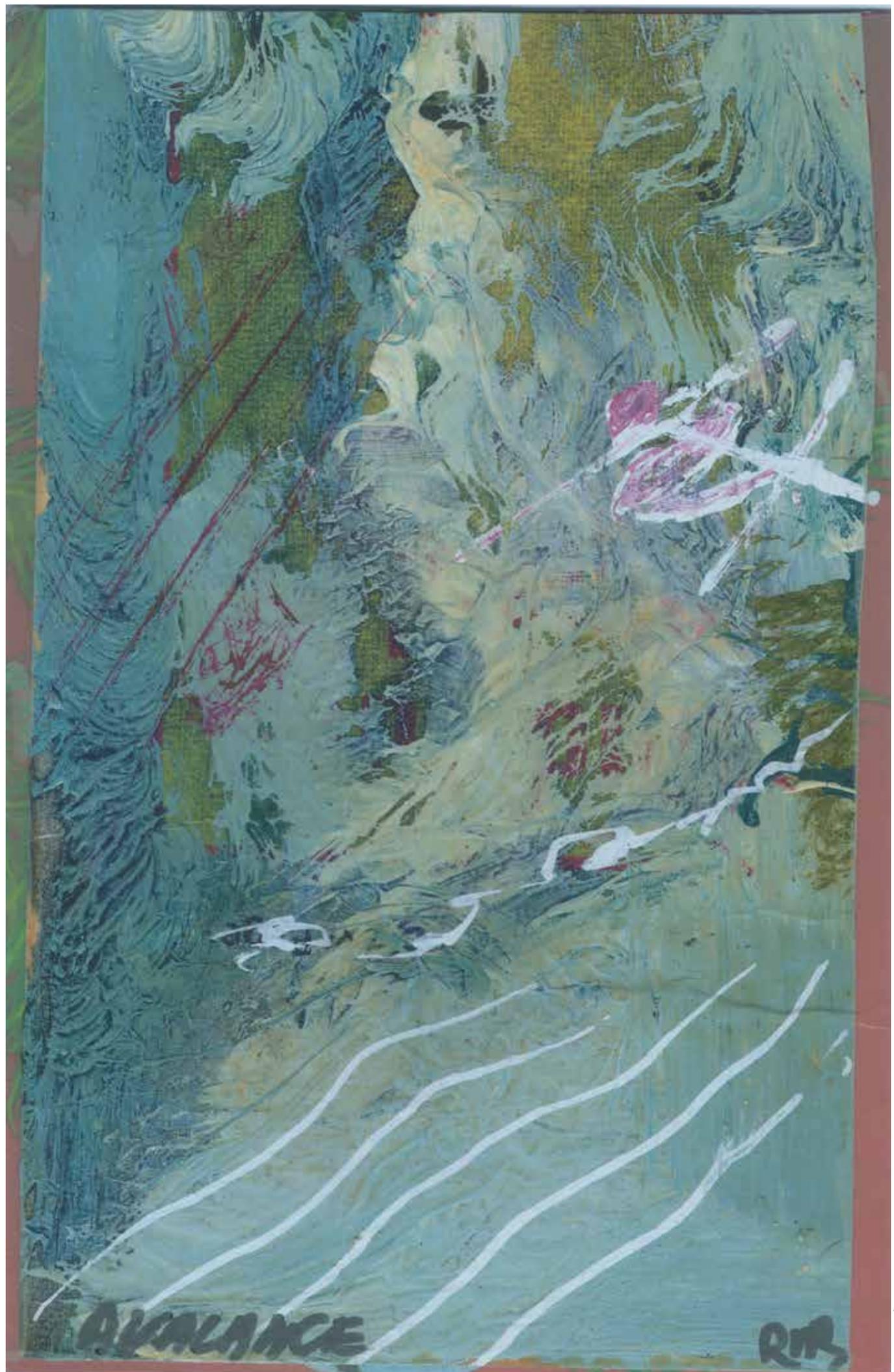
*The Pool*, size, title and medium unknown. c1960s  
Location unknown  
Opposite:  
*Avalanche*; paint on paper, 21x14cm approx., c1980s, Private collection

Ray was cremated and in a mark of respect his friends from the First Nation Quandamooka people stood across the rocks they had covered with flowers, facing the ocean while his daughter released his ashes into the water. At this interface, where vegetation meets the shoreline, the wind suddenly took the ashes and blew them back over the island.

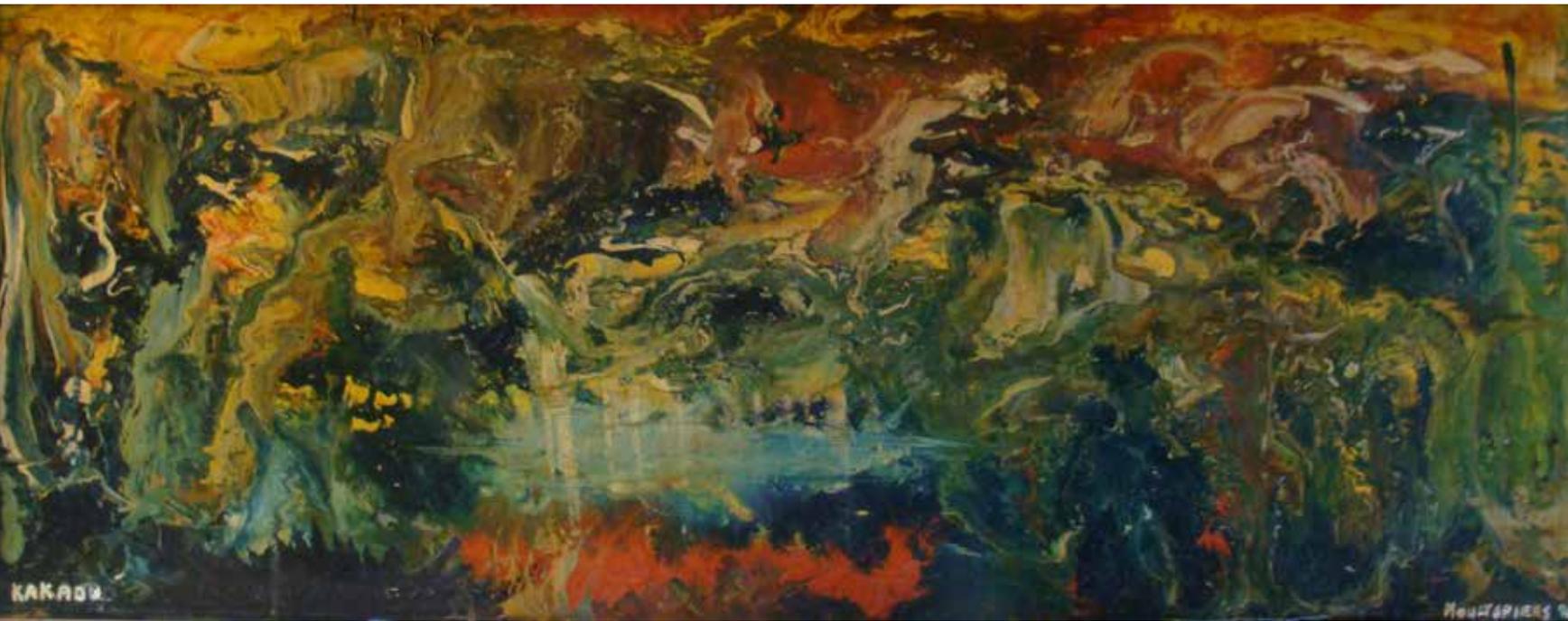
Although hidden from the Queensland art world, Moultspiers was part of the artistic foundation constructing an Australian identity through its art. He sustained a freedom of expression by keeping his own individualism alive.



*M*



*Rita*



Above:  
*Kakadu*; house paint on board, 39x97cm. c1980s,  
Private collection

Below:  
*Reverie*; oil and wax on board, 56x45cm. 1972,  
Private collection



None of his works were ever mistaken for masterpieces, but he was prepared to be involved in the waking of a nation to its own creative potential.

Moult-Speirs' contribution to the arts was recognised by the National Gallery of Australia when they acknowledged his passing in 1995 with a small obituary indicating the role he had played in the nation's art world and that his involvement was valued.

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*Five Young Contemporary Artists*: Ron Lampert, Kit Goninan, Collinridge Rivett, Peter Simpson and Ray Moultspiers



Above: Raymond in Gallery setting up for his last show in 1994. *Father Sun and Mother Moon*; Two-person show with Kim Webster; Dunwich Visitors Centre Art Gallery, North Stradbroke Island

Below: *Boudin in Tourville*; paint on particle board, 22x9cm, c1980s, Private collection. The title of this painting connects to Baudelaire's 1859 Salon review citing the lack of urban landscapes. Boudin was soon one of the first artists to paint outdoors with his painting of the popular resort beach at Tourville.



*OR*