

of artists like Russell Drysdale. Living in England had confirmed for her that a sense of lyricism and seasonal change were important for her art-making. With this in mind, she searched for a suitable place to settle, from the Northern Tablelands down to the Victorian border. Three Ponds, in the Central Tablelands, was found: "sub-Alpine climate; and area generally called Black Springs; seasonally affected, so that you get the full range from the winter and the snow through to the rolling summer climate, with fields and hay." This is the country that provided the inspiration for the *Three Ponds* series of paintings, which she began in 2000.

The full series of paintings comprises three groups of works. Series A contains 15 large paintings that are topographical and aerial, most of them based on bird's-eye images of the landscape taken by a photographer from a helicopter. One of these works, *On the Goulburn Road* 2000, has just been acquired by the Bathurst Regional Art Gallery. Series B is smaller, both in the number of works and their size. These are geometric landscapes in yellows and pale blue that relate to the impact of drought in 2002. Series C, which is being exhibited in this current exhibition, contains two parts, of 15 paintings each.

By choosing to work in a series, Collocott opened herself to the charge of a serialism of "mere repetition with variations".<sup>6</sup> For an artist trained in the 1960s, when art historical orthodoxy dictated that for a work to be genuinely creative it needed to be original, this is a major offence. Series C of *Three Ponds* compounds the offence by using a digital scan of the same tiny original sketch as the basis for every work in the series. Collocott, however, finds freedom in the "repeats and echoes" that this unifying device gives to the series. She believes that landscape particularly lends itself to a serial treatment, being both open to variation and specific at the same time. It provides a visual and conceptual cohesion to a body of work, without being restrictive: "... my paintings don't set out to be true to place, other than being a mechanism and a structure to work inside of. The structures are related to place, but the way the paintings evolved and developed just became part of the studio environment."<sup>7</sup>

There has always been a human presence in Collocott's landscapes. In the earliest works, the interaction of people and place was marked figuratively. In the *Three Ponds* series it has become more textual. Passages from letters and diaries, some coherent and others more mysterious, are embedded in the landscapes. Collocott is a compulsive archivist. Her personal archive, now in the collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, contains a huge collection of visual diaries that document art happenings, the daily weather, politics, breaking news, the unusual and mundane details of her daily life. Unlike a standard artist's archive that commonly documents only key moments in an artist's career and which is often arbitrary in content, Collocott's personal archive is multi-layered: it is seemingly comprehensive and random, but in fact carefully selected and orchestrated. This same quality is found in her works:

"They are also multi-layered, in that you've got images within images. You've got repeats. It's like looking down a well. I'm interested in the ripple effect and although they are two dimensional and flat, which I like is the idea of layering, like looking into water. You stand on the edge of your dam and you see the water and then maybe you see a fish and then you start to see the reflections behind it, the barns and the trees ... I love the idea of playing around with layering. You are guiding the eye through and over things. Is this on top of that or that on top of this? You get an oscillation between surface levels. Then you have license to do something lyrical, so you stick in some birds. Every now and then you need something structural to change the rhythm of the surface."<sup>8</sup>