The evil conditions of artistic success: A study of the ways in which Albert Tucker and his *Images of Modern Evil* series travelled together towards public acclaim.

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Contents

Acknowledgements p. 3

Abstract p. 4

Introduction p. 5

Chapter One
The creation of the Modern Evil series: Putting Tucker’s art into context p. 11

Chapter Two
Critics and patrons at home and abroad: The journey of the Modern Evil series p. 25

Chapter Three
Tucker’s return to fame: The secondary reception of the Modern Evil series p. 34

Conclusion p. 44

Bibliography p. 47

Illustrations p. 52
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Abstract

Albert Tucker was significantly undervalued at the time in which he first began displaying his art. The *Modern Evil* series, his initial series of work, was underrated at the time of their creation. Thus, the inspiration for this thesis emerged from a desire to analyse Tucker’s development as an artist and to observe the ways in which he achieved the level of success that his names holds today.

Hence, this thesis traces the steps of Tucker’s first body of works, the *Modern Evil* series and tracks the development of an Australian artist whose path to success was marked by his initial series of works. With keen reference to the theory of success as stated by Alan Bowness, this thesis will discuss the many aspects of Tucker’s early career.

Bowness claims that there are four stages of crucial importance to an artist’s success, and it is the aim of this thesis to apply each stage to the career of Albert Tucker. Taking into account the *Modern Evil* series, Tucker’s first body of work, this thesis will break down the path to success that Tucker undertook and analyse precisely what hurdles lay in Tucker's path as he travelled toward success.

Specifically, this thesis will analyse factors such as Tucker’s involvement with other artists’ at the time of the series creation as well as his participation with institutions such as the Contemporary Art Society and the Angry Penguin group.

Following this, the discussion will develop to an analysis of the later parts of Tucker’s career including the initial critical response to the works and the acquisition of patronage. Finally, the secondary reception of the *Modern Evil* series will be considered allowing for reflections to be made on how and when the series carried Tucker to the levels of success that his name has now come to represent.
Introduction

Visiting The Ian Potter Centre: National Gallery of Victoria in 2009, Albert Tucker’s *Footballer’s* series filled me with a sense of national pride. I became enthralled with the style and passion of Tucker’s art as the pieces managed to capture me with the innate patriotism that lay behind each one. Having studied Tucker briefly in my undergraduate degree, I instinctively knew I wanted to learn more about the art of this man and how he was able to create such inspired pieces.

During the early months of 2010, Sotheby’s Australia held an auction of Tucker’s landscapes entitled ‘Albert Tucker: The timeless land’, and again I was captivated by the intensity that lay behind Tucker’s art. Quick searches on Albert Tucker provided a number of accounts heralding him as a great Australian artist; while there is also a considerable amount of attention paid to his later works of art such as his *Portraits* series and his *Parrots* series. Before the sources delve into an analysis of his later series, these same accounts often merely provide cursory mention to the *Modern Evil* series, while claiming the series to be most important body of work in his oeuvre. This was not sufficient for me. I wished to go back to the start and to observe the works that Tucker created before Sotheby’s was auctioning his works, before three sales in New York came to define him, back to when the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV) was firm in their rejection of purchasing his works. Hence, the inspiration for my thesis arose from wanting to know how Albert Tucker achieved the level of success and fame that his name is now associated with.

As such, this thesis aims to follow Tuckers’ artistic development with regard to his initial series of work, the *Modern Evil* series, and observe how Tucker and this series came to represent a significant moment in Australian art. Furthermore, this thesis will apply Alan Bowness’ theory of artistic success to the development and ultimate success of Albert Tuckers’ works.

But first, it is important to define the term ‘success’ and determine what the term constitutes. There are many factors that one must consider when
regarding the ways in which ‘success’ can be measured. For example, some artists may place an importance on financial success whilst others may be more concerned with critical acclaim or public reception. Who determines when an artist may be deemed successful? When can an artist declare himself to be a success?

Alan Bowness, a British art historian was the director of the Tate Gallery, London, between the years 1980 and 1988.¹ In his lecture entitled ‘The Conditions of Success, How the Modern artist rises to fame’, Bowness discusses the concept of success and claims that there are four concise stages that an artist must overcome in order to be considered successful.² Although Bowness does not define exactly what he considers success to be, he places a keen emphasis on fame as being the pinnacle of an artist’s career, using artists with international recognition to illustrate his theory.

The general argument, as stated by Bowness, is that artistic success is not an arbitrary phenomenon.³ Bowness wished to dissolve all preconceptions surrounding the myth of the artist – specifically, to rebuke all claims that artistic fame is unpredictable. In the introduction to his lecture, the author claims “success is conditioned, in an almost deterministic way. Artistic fame is predictable.”⁴

Bowness’ theory is a significant source to refer to when analysing what constitutes artistic success, as there are few accounts that share Bowness’ coherent presentation of ideas and argumentative strength. It is difficult to find sources that are similar to or argue against that of Bowness, instead, one often finds instances that feed the myth of the artist Bowness so wishes to dissipate. For example, Ann-Marie Willis, author of Illusions of Identity: The Art of Nation, encourages the popular stereotype as she describes, “the image of the heroic, lonely, struggling artist, whose genius is finally recognized, always too late.”⁵

¹ (“Sir Alan Bowness,” 2003)
² (Bowness, 1989) p. 11
³ (Bowness, 1989) p. 7
⁴ (Bowness, 1989) p. 7
⁵ (Willis, 1993) p. 42
One of the most successful elements of Bowness’ argument is the way in which he is able to break down the myth of the artist and offer a reflection on the psychological elements of creativity. Attempting to find alternative sources that hold similar qualities to Bowness’ theory is therefore difficult. Rather, many works of literature are often aimed at the artists themselves. For example, Sue Forster’s *The Art of Self Promotion*, which is an account that outlines steps and motions for artists wishing to obtain a “professional reputation and public appreciation” of their work.\(^6\) As such, few sources provide clear and concise arguments regarding the phenomenon of success as Bowness does. Given the lack of intellectual debate on the subject of artistic success, this thesis will follow Bowness’ theory closely in order to dissect the idea of how artistic success can be obtained.

The composition of Bowness’ argument is built up around his belief that artistic success can be traced between four critical stages, each of which contributes to an artist’s resulting fame. In short, he believes that there is a “clear and regular progression towards artistic success.”\(^7\) Employing the history of exceptional artists to illustrate his argument, Bowness discusses the many facets of a creative lifestyle and breaks down the idea of artistic success into four critical stages, each as important as the other in building towards the final stage – public recognition.\(^8\) The stages he cites are, in order, peer recognition, critical recognition, acquisition of patronage and as mentioned, public recognition. By breaking down the path to success in such a methodical manner, Bowness is dismissing the structures of exaggerated myth which so often surround the life of an artist.

When introducing his argument Bowness states, “there is a general supposition even among the educated public that there is something arbitrary about artistic success.”\(^9\) The simple manner in which Bowness presents his theory enables one to become increasingly convinced that his argument holds merit, and I believe that he does succeed in explaining his theory and

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\(^6\) (Forster, 1993) p. 6  
\(^7\) (Bowness, 1989) p. 7  
\(^8\) (Bowness, 1989) p. 7  
\(^9\) (Bowness, 1989) p. 7
persuasively argues that “there is a clear and regular progression towards artistic success, ... conditions of success, ... can be exactly described.”¹⁰

It is my personal belief and the overall argument of this thesis that the Modern Evil series marks a point in Tucker’s career that was paramount in shaping his success. In 1963, Robert Hughes wrote for Art and Australia stating that there has never been a more revolutionary movement than the modern movement which took place in Melbourne of the 1940s and in which Tucker was a key figure.¹¹ How then, did the Modern Evil series transform from being an unknown body of works during the time in which they were created, to being pieces of art marking a “revolutionary” moment within Australian art history? What events carried Tucker and the Modern Evil series to the level of admiration that they now hold?

As a body of work, the Modern Evil series was not considered successful or even popular until the late 1950s, which leads one to question Tucker’s development as an artist even more. How did Tucker manage to alter the reception of the series? Illustrating this is the fact that when the pieces were first exhibited in group shows, (Tucker often displayed only 5 or 6), few critics mentioned the works at all in the their reviews. And yet, considering Tucker’s success in terms of today’s monetary value, it is useful to observe a market profile of Albert Tucker created by Roger Dedman in an issue of Art and Australia. Dedman ascertains that the Modern Evil series are the “rarest and most keenly sought after” of Tucker’s oeuvre.¹² On two instances, pieces from the series have sold for prices that far surpassed their estimates; for example, a small watercolour from the series sold at Sotheby’s for $28,750 against it’s original estimate of between $7,000 and $10,000.¹³ What developments took place to significantly alter the perception of works that were not considered worthy of reviewing in the 1940s? What factors came into play that made the monetary worth of these pieces so high? Observing the career development of Albert Tucker this thesis endeavours to consider these questions and to argue,

¹⁰ (Bowness, 1989) p. 7
¹¹ (Hughes, 1963), p. 253
¹² (Dedman, 1996) p. 280
¹³ (Dedman, 2004), p. 280
alongside Bowness’ beliefs, that there are specific phases an artist must pass before his work can be publicly acclaimed and given high monetary value.

In doing so, the first chapter of this thesis will dissect the creation of the *Modern Evil* series and discuss the development of Tucker’s initial collection of works in relation to what Bowness describes as the “peer recognition” stage.\(^4\) The *Modern Evil* series is an important body of work to consider when analysing the success of Albert Tucker as it marks the beginning of his career. The series contains a total of 39 works and began in 1943.\(^5\) The series was not exhibited as a body of works until many years after it was completed, instead, Tucker often displayed 5 or 6 pieces at annual group shows in affiliation with the Contemporary Art Society (CAS).\(^6\) The fact that Tucker displayed pieces from the *Modern Evil* series within a group context will be discussed at length in this chapter, as it is an important element of Bowness’ theory: collaborating with peers and contemporaries being a significant element of success.

The second chapter centres on the second and third stages of Bowness’ theory. Bowness asserts that having progressed through the first stage of success, the second stage is that of critical response. After the critics have created a dialogue with which to discuss the work of an artist, the work can then be discussed freely within the forum the critic has created.\(^7\) Following the attention of critics comes the praise from dealers, constituting Bowness’ third stage of success.\(^8\)

When presenting his argument, Bowness employs the history of artists who possessed clearly defined critics whom critique their work and dealers who handle the selling of their works. Unfortunately, such clearly defined roles were not a part of Tucker’s career as the *Modern Evil* series began to be displayed. John Reed was a driving force behind Tucker’s career in a number of ways, and two important manners that he encouraged Tucker’s work was through the critique and patronage that he offered.\(^9\) Hence, the second

\(^{14}\) (Bowness, 1989) p. 11  
\(^{15}\) (Avent, 1996), p. 2, 4, 5, 6  
\(^{16}\) (“Contemporary Art Society, Sixth Annual Exhibition Catalogue,” 1944)  
\(^{17}\) (Bowness, 1989) p. 23, 25  
\(^{18}\) (Bowness, 1989) p. 39  
\(^{19}\) (Hughes, February 14th - 16th, 1994), (Heathcote, 1995) p. 156
chapter aims to analyse the relationship between Tucker and Reed with regards to the *Modern Evil* series and how as a body of work they contributed to Reed’s desire for Australia’s new cultural life of the 1940s.\(^{20}\)

The third chapter of this thesis aims analyse the secondary reception of the *Modern Evil* series. This chapter will examine the relationship between the reception of Tucker’s work upon his return to Australia and the final stage of Bowness’ theory, specifically, public recognition.\(^{21}\) In the time that Tucker spent abroad the attitude towards the period of art in which the *Modern Evil* series was created had been shifted, and so too had the Australian art market.\(^{22}\) Ultimately this meant that the ways in which Tucker was received upon his return to his homeland stood in stark contrast to the attitudes he had received when leaving the country.

Fundamentally, this thesis attempts to break down the components that constructed Albert Tucker’s success, mapping each segment with reference to Tucker’s first body of works, the *Modern Evil* series.

\(^{20}\) (Heathcote, 1995) p. 101
\(^{21}\) (Bowness, 1989) p. 11
\(^{22}\) (Heathcote, 1995)p. 157, 159 (Van Den Bosch, 2005) p. 56
Chapter One

The creation of the *Modern Evil* series: Putting Tucker’s art into context

“It is always the artists themselves who are first to recognize exceptional talent.”23 – Bowness

The first stage of Bowness’ theory is entitled peer recognition. Bowness claims that this initial stage is the most important, as it creates the foundation on which the artist will build the rest of their career.24 Bowness believes an artists peers are “highly perceptive” when it comes to recognising talent, and goes on to say that “in any group of artists, some stand out.”25 Illustrating the importance of peer recognition Bowness uses artist Van Gogh as an example. Bowness attributes Van Gogh’s success in Paris to the Post Impressionists he associated himself with upon arrival. Had artists such as Gauguin and Seurat not recognised the talent and new kind of painting Van Gogh possessed, it is unlikely that they would have been bothered in affiliating themselves with such a “difficult and uncouth Dutchman.”26

When discussing the theoretical aspects of artistic success, Bowness often cites examples that focus on individual artists such as Van Gogh as was just discussed. Although the main body of his argument centres on individuals, Bowness does consider artistic groups and notes that, “The gathering together of a group of talented painters ... is significant in itself.”27 It is this element of Bowness’ argument of peer recognition that I am most interested in as it allows for a broader application of his ideas. Regarding Bowness’ analysis of artistic groups, this chapter will apply Bowness’ theory to Tucker and the two artistic societies he affiliated himself with, namely, the CAS and the Angry Penguin group.

23 (Bowness, 1989) p. 16
24 (Bowness, 1989) p. 11
25 (Bowness, 1989) p. 12
26 (Bowness, 1989) p. 16
27 (Bowness, 1989) p. 16
The first half of this chapter aims to illustrate the environment in which the CAS and Angry Penguin group created their art. The chapter will employ the use newspaper articles from *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Australian* in order to gain a deeper understanding of the immediate environment in which both groups were working within. Moreover, interviews with Tucker conducted by James Gleeson and Robin Hughes will be highly utilized given the detail that Tucker conveys in his answers to their questions. Although this may not fit in immediately with Bowness’ theory, as mentioned, it is important to grasp an understanding of the conditions that Tucker and his peers were enduring in order to gain a deeper understanding of how the CAS and Angry Penguin groups functioned. Additionally, the manner in which Tucker went about creating the series holds great significance here as the creative techniques he often employed were especially affected by the world he was observing, such as people watching from his bedsit.

Having discussed the social elements of the *Modern Evil* series in terms of their inspirational and contextual affects, the second half of this chapter will focus on the peer orientated environment in which the series was first displayed. The fact that the *Modern Evil* series developed during a time that Tucker was committed to the CAS and Angry Penguin group fuels the thought behind Bowness’ theory. Both groups are often cited as being important institutions for the history of Australian art and the fact that whole groups of artists were involved in the societies supports Bowness’ thought.28

The social climate in which the CAS and Angry Penguin’s grew in is an important element behind the intentions behind the groups. Tucker’s *Modern Evil* series have come to be exemplar of the types of works the CAS was producing and Angry Penguins journal was discussing. Hence, observing inspirational and contextual elements of the series, one is able to ascertain the types of social and environmental conditions in which Tucker and his peers came together. Keen reference will be paid to CAS exhibition catalogues, newspaper articles and issues of the Angry Penguins journal as these sources

enable one to understand at a deeper level the relationships between Tucker and his peers.

The turbulent time in which the *Modern Evil* series was created is important to recognize because of the impact it had on Albert Tucker. The community Tucker was living and working in greatly inspired the content of the series, hence why an analysis of the developments taking place must be undertaken.\textsuperscript{29} Overall, Tucker’s *Modern Evil* works are excessively dark in both their depiction and the manner in which Tucker chose to illustrate his images. Tucker was exposed to moral corruption on a daily basis and his reaction to the public permeated into his art. An example of the impact the community had on Tucker can be observed in an interview with Robin Hughes, Editorial Consultant for Screen Australia. Tucker describes the scenes that he saw:

> Every lamppost had a drunk hanging on it. Every pub there was a brawl or a fight taking place ... so this aspect of it was brutal and savage and open. And then the ... on the female end of it, of course, it was the prostitution, sexual end of it ... that all combined in producing an image which emerged out of it, I don’t know why, it became a compulsion with me.\textsuperscript{30}

Although Tucker is describing the type of behaviour he saw in the street, he could quite easily be describing a scene from one of his *Modern Evil* works. Many works in the series contain lampposts and have an element of sexual misdemeanour as at times his figures have exposed genitals and rest in erotic positions. For example, Figure 1, *Modern Evil, Spring in Fitzroy* (1943). The shape of the figure encompasses most of the canvas and the focus remains on the lower half of the figure. The legs are spread wide and just above, the figures chest is prominent with jutting ribs and rounded breasts. The arms of the figure are raised and the head is thrown back. Given the sharp lines and washed out colours that Tucker uses to illustrate the form, he successfully

\textsuperscript{29} (Fry, 2005) p. 10
\textsuperscript{30} (Hughes, February 14th - 16th, 1994)
manages to depict sexuality in harsh and crude manner. As Tucker mentions prostitution in his interview with Hughes, it is most likely that the figure in *Spring in Fitzroy* was influenced by the scenes he describes in the interview.

Tucker’s observations are supported by Marilyn Lake in her article ‘Desire for a Yank: Sexual Relations between Women and American Servicemen in World War II’. Lake focuses on the presence of American soldiers in Melbourne and the lax social niceties they carried with them.\(^{31}\) Lake blames the American servicemen for what Tucker describes as “the prostitution, sexual end of it.”\(^{32}\) Lake claims that American men corrupted young local girls with their public displays of affection, afternoon drinking and overall promiscuous attitudes.\(^{33}\) Obviously, the society that Tucker was observing was one which lacked moral values.

Not only were there vast social developments taking place, Melbourne was also preoccupied with the Second World War taking place overseas. Newspaper headlines read, ‘War in the Air, German Activity over England’, ‘703 Planes Down, German Losses’, and ‘More Hong Kong Evacuees, Sixth Ship Arrives’.\(^{34}\) Clearly these were tumultuous and anxiety ridden times. The dark nature of the *Modern Evil* series seems almost expected given the events taking place overseas as well as those on the home front.

The focus on darkness in the *Modern Evil* series should come as no surprise to viewers considering Tucker’s attitude towards his immediate environment. Tucker’s focus on melancholic elements of society became personified in Tucker’s use of light, as he only ever depicted it as coming from unnatural sources. It should be noted briefly at this point that Tucker’s unique depiction of light, or lack thereof, coincides with the values of the CAS – wishing to go against the attitudes of traditional artists that came before them, such as the Impressionists, a group that was so taken with Australia’s natural light.\(^{35}\) Rather than emphasising light and drawing out its presence in

\(^{31}\) (Lake, 1992) p. 631,  
\(^{32}\) (Hughes, February 14th - 16th, 1994)  
\(^{33}\) (Lake, 1992) p. 623  
\(^{34}\) (Herald, 1941) p. 11, (Argus, 1940) p. 2  
\(^{35}\) (Willis, 1993) p. 64
the Australian landscape, Tucker chooses to use it minimally and to instead emphasise darkness heavily.

Personifying Tucker’s depiction of light is in Figure 2, *Modern Evil No. 14* (1945), where light appears only from the tram looming towards the foreground of the painting and from the streetlights hovering above. Minimal amounts of light are depicted and where it is created on the canvas, the colours are dark in shade. For example, the glow seeping through from the tram is composed of dark shades of yellow and brown with a sparing use of red. The light that escapes from the streetlights is made up of a dark yellow hue. Thin streaks of light protrude from the bulbs reiterating the importance of shadows in the piece and drawing attention to the innovative manner in which Tucker manipulates light in the *Modern Evil* series.

The image of the tram came to be an important part of the series as it was somewhat of a Melbourne icon. The tram was a significant symbol of the city for Tucker and his contemporaries. The presence of the tram in *No. 14* speaks loudly of the message Tucker and his peers wished to display in their art. This is reiterated in ‘Albert Tucker, an exhibition’, which took place at Australian Galleries, Collingwood in 1964. The exhibition catalogue state that Tucker and his contemporaries had to “discover themselves as artists in their own immediate environment, which was the city … their paintings of this period reflect this environment.”

Therefore, the debauchery that Tucker was observing in the city, in terms of the urban environment and social behaviour came to be of paramount importance within the *Modern Evil* series. When talking to James Gleeson, Tucker comments that the “dark shadows” and “sexual context of all St Kilda Road”, “the schoolgirl tart thing, the victory girls”, all assisted in the creating of his works, in fact he states, “this was all feeding me at the time.”

Additionally, the image of the tram held important personal connotations for Tucker. To him, it stood as a symbol of terror and distress, which he discusses with Gleeson. Tucker reiterates an experience where he

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36 (“Albert Tucker’, Australian Galleries,” 1964)
37 (Gleeson, 1979) p. 10
found himself caught on some tram tracks in the city, he claims that before he knew what was happening, there was a tram bearing down on him. The experience shook Tucker to such an extent that it seemed natural for the tram to become “almost a stock image of threat, of impending disaster, of fear.”

Figure 3, *Modern Evil, No. 15* (1945) is an excellent example to refer to when analysing the mixture of urban environment and social distress in the *Modern Evil* series. No. 15 encapsulates both Tucker’s sparing use of light and depicts a grimy urbanized scene. In this work two lonely figures stand in the foreground underneath streetlamps, the only source of light in the picture. Tall buildings loom in the background of the piece and have been formed with dark shades that reiterate Tucker’s concept of dark shadows. Tucker has depicted the buildings as being close together and with alternate heights, evoking themes of neglect from viewers. The windows of the buildings also aids in exaggerating these ideas. Few ‘lights’ are depicted as being on and the ones that do have light are painted in narrow shapes with smudged hues that echo desolation and sadness. Whilst these opinions are subject to one’s own interpretations, there is no doubt that this work is incredibly dark and eerie. The fact that the figures are huddled together and in clear view under the lamppost produces a sense of fear in the work, as if anywhere that is not shroud in light is considered dangerous. Again, although this is a single interpretation, as one is aware of Tucker’s fascination with shadows and darkness, along with his outrage at the society he was observing, one must read these works bearing these facets in mind.

It was customary for Tucker to view the city; the trafficking, the people, the corruption and the conduct, from the confines of his home. Hence, Tucker’s living circumstances played a key role in how the *Modern Evil* series was created. Tucker’s working space was also his living space, thus particular images originated from considering the location of Tucker at the time.

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38 (Gleeson, 1979) p. 22
39 (Gleeson, 1979), p. 22
40 (Gleeson, 1979) p. 41
41 (Burke, 2002) p. 244, 255
Victorian terraces are often repeated throughout the series, whether it be in an exaggerated or minimal manner and this is often due to the living situation that Tucker found himself in when he was working. *Modern Evil, No. 24* (1945), Figure 4, for example, illustrates the interior of a Victorian terrace looking out onto the street below, precisely how Tucker was contemplating the world. The lattice pattern of the terrace’s balcony stands in the centre of the work with layers of paint emphasising the intricate detail. The fact that the balcony is situated in the work so as to obscure the background, allows viewers to share the same perspective as Tucker – watching the world from the inside. Echoing the type of scenes in which Tucker was most likely observing is the heavy layers paint that Tucker applies. By using a number of layers on a pattern that is so intricate, it gives the illusion of corrosion as segments become smudged and colours run into each other. Ultimately, this evokes a feeling of decay from viewers, enabling them to be placed where Tucker was as he created *No. 24*, observing the world from inside his room at the terrace.

Furthermore, *Modern Evil, Spring in Fitzroy* that was discussed earlier also displays visible elements of a terrace house. The skyline of the city rests in the background of the piece and acting as an overlay of this is intricate ironwork indicating a balcony of sorts. On the right hand side of the piece, predominantly behind the figure, there is a patterned wall which indicates the inside of terrace and ultimately gives viewers the feeling that they are inside a house looking out onto the world.

Tucker discusses the idea of him looking through his window and creating works from this perspective in an interview with James Gleeson. Tucker claims that, for the most part, the area in which he lived affected the images he depicted.\(^42\) When describing *Modern Evil, No. 29* (1946), Figure 5, and *Modern Evil, No. 30* (1947) Tucker asserts that the scenes for these works were merely the views from out the window when living in Agnes St, Jolimont.\(^43\) A change in Tucker’s living situation can be observed in *Modern Evil, No. 32* (1947) when the artist moved to Robe St. in St. Kilda.\(^44\)

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\(^{42}\) (Gleeson, 1979) p. 22

\(^{43}\) (Gleeson, 1979) p. 22

\(^{44}\) (Gleeson, 1979) p. 22
change in scenery may not be discernable to those who do not or have not visited Melbourne, however, to a trained eye one is able to recognize the differences. The scenes which Tucker captured moved away from being specifically inner-city to being more focused on a lifestyle that was especially prominent at the time the series was being created.

Having become familiarised with the significance of the imagery in the series and the inspiration that lay behind Tucker’s works, the ways in which Tucker integrated with his peers can be discerned and the theory of Bowness is able to be applied. The second half of this chapter will follow the peer-orientated environment in which the Modern Evil series grew. Ultimately, this section aims to apply Bowness’ theory to Tucker and his colleagues, specifically, following their engagement with the CAS and the Angry Penguin group. Bowness’ thought that “new beginnings in modern art arise out of ... early conjunctions with outstanding talents” will be thoroughly considered in relation to these groups and to the production and early exhibiting of the Modern Evil series.45

The CAS formed in 1938 under the initiation of George Bell.46 In The Sydney Morning Herald of that year, Bell stated that the CAS was an important establishment to have because “the formation of an Australian Academy of Art is an attempt at dictatorship ... A society such as I propose is necessary to combat this.”47 Hence, the CAS based its values on the need for fresh art, to create an establishment where artists were able to express a new experience in Australian art. It aimed to be a society that was not content with depicting the traditional rural battlers and capturing the illustrious Australian light, as mentioned earlier.48

The revolutionary nature of the society captured the attention of the public. In 1939, the annual CAS exhibition drew a crowd of 20,000.49 Bell declared the exhibition a “turning point” for Australian art.50 His enthusiasm

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45 (Bowness, 1989) p. 16
46 (Haese, 1981) p. 43
47 ("New Art Society, Criticism of Academy," 1938) p. 12
49 (Argus, 1940) p. 11
50 (Argus, 1940) p. 11
for the exhibitions reception derived from the diverse group of people it attracted. Bell claims some visitors were curious to see what the show entailed, other visitors were completely confused as to what was going on whilst others willed the works to be burnt. Surmising his reaction to the disparate crowd Bell stated, “That is what I regard as satisfying response. There was bored spectators … everybody felt something, even if it was only a desire to wreck the place.”

Academics in recent years have noted the pioneering spirit of the society. Christopher Heathcote, wrote the foreword of an exhibition catalogue for a show entitled ‘Style Wars: Modernism in Melbourne 1939 – 1959’, at Lauraine Diggins Fine Art Gallery. In his writing Heathcote claims that Tucker and his close contemporaries in the CAS created works of art in order to “release the valves of their pent up anxieties about contemporary life.” Heathcote also notes that during this period, these artists were creating more than just new visions, they were enabling new values to come into place and it was within the confines of this environment that the Modern Evil series developed and Tucker began to create works of art that grasped the attention from those working around him.

Similarly, writing for The Australian in 1976, Peter Ward discusses the art created in accordance with the CAS and the Angry Penguins. Wards article, entitled ‘New Life in Aging Penguins’, reviews aspects of Australian surrealism and the art of the 1940s. Although no specific works by Tucker are mentioned, the artist is still referred to because of his avid involvement. Ward states, “it is surely now time that the period and its achievement received a much larger retrospective and adequate critical documentation.”

Adequate documentation did come later of course, with James Mollison stating in 1982, “the artists of Melbourne in the 1940s wrote a splendid chapter in the history of Australian art.”

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51 (Argus, 1940) p. 11
52 (Heathcote, 2001) p. 32
53 (Ward, 1976)
54 (Ward, 1976)
55 (Mollison, 1990) p. 5
Australia, Images and Identity, 1688 – 1980, published in 1981, believes that the revolutionary nature of this period is intensified by the fact that “writers and were forming part of a new intellectual community, a professional ‘Bohemia’ in which they could see themselves as men committed to their art.”

Finally, art historian Gavin Fry and author of Albert Tucker, which was published in 2005, claims that the works of this period are highly important as a touchstone in Australian art history. Referring specifically to the Modern Evil series, he states that they have “come to stand for all the moral corruption and human desperation which was released by Australia’s experience of war on the home front.”

Each year, the CAS held an annual exhibition in which each artist displayed work. It was during these exhibitions that the underlying message of the CAS could be determined and the public was able to observe the manner in which the CAS was attempting to revolutionise art for Australia. This was stated in the constitution and rules of the CAS of 1944. The constitution of 1944 asserts that the aims of the society were to “encourage and stimulate young artists” simultaneously, as it wished to “promote a broader national vision in relation to contemporary art.”

It was not until the 1970s that the Modern Evil series was exhibited as a body of work for the first time at the Sweeny Reed Gallery. The exhibition was entitled ‘Night Images 1943 – 1947, (Images of Modern Evil)’ and displayed a total of 26 works from the series as well as a few works that were created around similar dates however were not included as part of the collection, for example Memory of Leonski (1943) and The Return (1943). Discerning the year in which Tucker held this exhibition was difficult because not many sources state the year and there is no date on the exhibition catalogue. Keith Avent wrote a review of the Modern Evil series for the NGA, and was bold in stating that the year of the show is unable to be determined.

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56 (White, 1981) p. 90
57 (Fry, 2005) p. 10
58 (“Constitution and Rules ”, 1944)
59 (“Constitution and Rules “, 1944)
60 (Henshaw, 1972), (McCaughey, 1972)
61 (Henshaw, 1972)
62 (Avent, 1996) p.4
However, through my own research I came across a newspaper clipping written by McCaughey, which states otherwise. The small article in The Age was printed on the 21\textsuperscript{st} of November 1972. In it, McCaughey discusses the \textit{Modern Evil} series and the fact that they had never been displayed in their entirety.\textsuperscript{63} Referring to the \textit{Modern Evil} series, McCaughey maintains that the exhibition taking place at the Sweeney Reed Gallery is to be marked as “one of the year’s most significant exhibitions.”\textsuperscript{64}

Importantly though, it is in regard to the annual exhibitions that the CAS held each year that Bowness’ theory is most applicable to the camaraderie of Tucker and his peers. Bowness’ theory that artistic recognition derives from an artistic community has important relevance in the field of exhibition as he stated that innovative art emerges from conjunctions between talents. When exhibiting, CAS members who were involved with the Angry Penguin group were able to easily be discerned against those who did not. The exhibition catalogues of annual CAS reveal certain details that demonstrate liaisons that run deeper than merely an involvement in the same society.

In the third, fifth and sixth exhibition catalogues for the annual CAS shows, Tucker and his peers (John Perceval, Sidney Nolan, Arthur Boyd) did not place a price next to their exhibiting pieces, in contrast to the other 88 artists that did.\textsuperscript{65} One is able to discern then that this particular clique within the CAS most likely placed a greater emphasis on the meanings of their works than most. In the sixth annual CAS exhibition of 1944, Albert Tucker displayed 6 works from the \textit{Modern Evil} series.\textsuperscript{66} Aforementioned, these pieces had no price next to them in the catalogue for the exhibition therefore placing an importance on the social and moral context of the work. By not placing prices on their art, these artists are highlighting the moral importance of their works rather than the commercial value that others chose.

\textsuperscript{63} (McCaughey, 1972)
\textsuperscript{64} (McCaughey, 1972)
\textsuperscript{66} (“Contemporary Art Society, Sixth Annual Exhibition Catalogue,” 1944)
The ways in which the exhibitions attendants interpreted this cannot be confidently ascertained. However, it is of my opinion that this is an act of defiance, and remains a strong social statement, even today. It is a significant element to be considered as it speaks volumes as to how Tucker and his peers worked together. Why was it only these artists who chose to not price their work? What significance did the pieces have if it not to take a stance against commercial and materialistic values?

The Angry Penguins group came into being in the early 1940s under the guidance of Max Harris and John Reed. The group produced a magazine on a regular basis and the type of literature that they created aimed to be a periodical that acted as a forum, for the “highest literary and art ... emerging from this country.” Writing for the fourth edition of the Angry Penguins journal in 1943, Max Harris states:

> With Angry Penguins 4 you see a change ... it has the support of the leading painters in the country through its connection with the Contemporary Art Society of Australia.

Harris’s statement reiterates the sense of partnership between Tucker and his peers. Many members of the CAS such as Albert Tucker, John Reed, Arthur Boyd and Sidney Nolan, were heavily involved with the Angry Penguins periodical as well, stressing their allegiance towards the message of both establishments; aiming to change the manner of Australian art.

Nevertheless, strong ties between the CAS and the Angry Penguin group can be seen in ways that are not as blatant as the statement above. Subtle instances of bias can be observed. For example, in the December issue of 1944 one is exposed to the prejudiced manner of Angry Penguins journalism. In the ‘Stop Press’ section of this issue there is a substantial write up above

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67 For the sake of this thesis, the Angry Penguins journal will be placed in italics whilst when referring to the group of artists whom were involved with the magazine, there will be no italics.

68 (Harris, 1943)

69 (Harris, 1943)
the George Bell Group show.\textsuperscript{70} The fact that there is so much space denoted to this demonstrates the attachment between the two groups and the bias that each held for the other. Furthermore, in a similar one-sided fashion, Reed reviews the ‘Anti-Fascist Exhibition’ in the same edition of the \textit{Angry Penguins}. Reed’s focus remained on artists who were strongly involved with both groups, such as Tucker, Perceval and Nolan.\textsuperscript{71} One could interpret the favouritism denoted by Reed as an act of cultivation, encouraging the importance of peer recognition and promoting the sense of community that these artists were working within. However, this will be discussed at greater length in chapter two.

Whilst the importance of working within a group orientated environment encouraged the art that Tucker was creating and obviously fosters a drive toward success, it is interesting to note that Tucker has rejected the idea that he and his peers were intentionally protesting. When Tucker is asked to describe the time in which the series began, specifically, asked to recall what made this time so significant for Australian art history, and for his career, his response is somewhat different to the opinions of Mollison, White and Fry as stated earlier. In an interview with Robin Hughes, Tucker is asked a very specific question about the early days of his career; “At that time were you at all conscious of where you were or what you were doing?” Tucker’s response, in short, was “No.” Tucker refers to Nolan, Boyd and himself as “zombies”, creating works that they “wanted to do at the moment.”\textsuperscript{72} Tucker claims that it was only later, that titles were added, labels were attached and categories were created.\textsuperscript{73} He refers to the emotional state in which the \textit{Modern Evil} series was created as being a “blind spot”, ultimately “unaware of the others, other peoples reactions.”\textsuperscript{74}

Although Tucker has asserted he and his contemporaries were not consciously searching for reactions with their art, the theory of Bowness is still very much applicable to Tucker’s first stage of success. In the types of work

\textsuperscript{70} (Harris and Reed, 1944) p. 112
\textsuperscript{71} (J. Reed, 1943) p. 9, 10, 11
\textsuperscript{72} (Hughes, February 14th - 16th, 1994)
\textsuperscript{73} (Hughes, February 14th - 16th, 1994)
\textsuperscript{74} (Hughes, February 14th - 16th, 1994)
that he was creating, consciously or not, Tucker placed value on working within a community as can be asserted by his involvement with the CAS and Angry Penguins. In doing so, Tucker’s works were fuelled with content that enabled him to become preoccupied with the messages behind the paintings rather than on the monetary or fashionable elements of art. Therefore, an emphasis was instead, placed on creating works in accordance with the CAS and refusing to place prices on their paintings, as has been seen. As Bowness states, “the gathering together of a group of talents painters … is significant in itself.”75 This reiterates the point that this close group of artists was highly concerned with the process of the art that they were making, rather than attempting to create pieces purely for their value.

75 (Bowness, 1989) p. 16
Chapter Two

Critics and patrons at home and abroad: The journey of the *Modern Evil* series

“Almost every major talent attracts one or two important collectors at an early stage in his career, and these collectors almost always appear on the scene because of their friendships with artists.”76 – Bowness

After an artist has received recognition from his peers, Bowness believes the next stage towards success for a modern artist is recognition from critics.77 Following this, dealers and patrons will subsequently become interested in the artists’ work, more often than not forging successful partnerships, which significantly aid in the development of the artist’s career.78 This chapter aims to examine Tucker’s progression through both these stages.

Whilst Bowness presents these stages as being two separate entities, this chapter will argue that in the unique case of Tucker both stages become merged. Hence why, for the sake of this of this chapter it will be argued that for Tucker, the second and third stages of success are a combined stage. For Tucker, his main critic was also his patron and dealer – John Reed.

To begin with this chapter will focus applying Bowness’ theory to the initial reception of the *Modern Evil* series and how the series was critiqued within the art world of the 1940s. Illustrating the ways in which Bowness’ theory can be applied to the work of Tucker, this chapter will draw on newspaper articles and editions of the *Angry Penguins* journal in order to emphasise Tucker’s transition between the second and third stages.

Subsequently, the second half of the chapter will follow the complex patron and dealer relationship between Reed and Tucker, observing the manner in which Reed’s leadership influenced the *Modern Evil* series. Again, editions from the *Angry Penguins* journal will be drawn from along with

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76 (Bowness, 1989) p. 39  
77 (Bowness, 1989) p. 21  
78 (Bowness, 1989) p. 39
interviews with Tucker, exhibition catalogues and comprehensive accounts on Tucker such as Janine Burke’s *Australian Gothic*.

Let us commence by exploring the idea of the critic. According to Bowness, critics play an essential role in the evolving career of an artist and are in fact intrinsic to their success.\(^79\) Often critics can be found working out of the artistic community and from here, there are two reasons in particular that makes the role of a critic an intrinsic element of an artist’s success. Notably, the critics create the dialogue with which to discuss the art, and after having achieved this, the critics create a forum in which the art can be freely talked about.\(^80\) This is an important part of the critic’s role as without this there would be no language with which to discuss art and no space in which to discuss it.

Informed critics are not often thought to be popular with the artists since their relationship with the creator is not their criteria.\(^81\) Bowness uses critics such as Clement Greenberg and Herbert Read to demonstrate his theory of the critic, affirming that both highly influenced the critical debate of the time.\(^82\) Specifically, Greenberg provided a dialogue to discuss artists such as Jackson Pollock and David Smith. In a similar fashion, Read enabled discussion over the works of Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and Ben Nicholson.\(^83\)

Most of the artists, critics and dealers that Bowness refers to in his argument derive from societies and cities that have a far more established art scenes than Australia did in the 1940s. The Australian art scene was not as reputable as the one which Greenberg and Read were critiquing, therefore this must be taken into account when examining the reviews of Tucker’s work from the time in which the series was being created. However, as has been observed in chapter one of this thesis, there was an emerging arts scene with groups of

\(^{79}\) (Bowness, 1989) p. 21
\(^{80}\) (Bowness, 1989) p. 25
\(^{81}\) (Bowness, 1989) p. 32
\(^{82}\) (Bowness, 1989) p. 25
\(^{83}\) (Bowness, 1989) p. 25
artists creating work in societies such as the CAS, and then discussing the art in periodicals such as the Angry Penguins journal.

It is here that one must fully understand the position of Reed and consider the ways in which his power aided in the promotion of Tucker and the Modern Evil series. Tucker was very much in need of Reed’s praise during the initial show of the Modern Evil series. When Tucker was first exhibiting the Modern Evil series in accordance with the CAS exhibitions, the critics that followed the art scene paid his works little attention. Rather, his peer and close friend Sidney Nolan received most of the acclaim whilst Tucker patiently awaited his turn to be praised.84

Consequently, as the Modern Evil series was undervalued, so too was Tucker as an artist and it is therefore difficult to find early critiques of his work in newspaper archives. Given the scale of events happening elsewhere in the world during this time, reviews were permitted only a small amount of space. Clive Turnbull, working for The Herald often critiqued the annual CAS shows however his focus was rarely on Tucker and instead, was captured by the art of Sidney Nolan.85 Turnbull reviewed the annual CAS show of both 1944 and 1945, both of which Tucker exhibited 6 Modern Evil works.86 Although Turnbull claimed the 1945 show was better than that of 1944, Tucker was not mentioned in either write up.87

Similarly, Paul Haefliger also reviewed the annual CAS show of 1944. Haefliger is full of praise towards the exhibition and describes it as being a show which is symptomatic of its time.88 The innovative style of the works Haefliger observed is captured in the following quote, “The real importance of the art of our century lies in its pioneering spirit, in its discoveries of new, and rediscovers of old values.”89 Given the revolutionary style of the Modern Evil series one could expect Tucker’s name to be mentioned in Haefliger’s review however Tucker and his works receive no mention at all.

84 (Review, 1944)
85 (Burke, 2002) p. 255
86 (Burke, 2002) p. 255
87 (Burke, 2002) p. 255
88 (Haefliger, 1944)
89 (Haefliger, 1944)
With Turnbull and Haefliger paying Tucker’s works little attention, it is therefore more important to recognise the publicity that Reed gave Tucker. It was up to Reed to create what Bowness describes to be a dialogue and a forum in which to explore Tucker and his works. Reed’s inclusion of Tucker in editions of the *Angry Penguins* journal and his constant championing of Tucker in his writing can be read as a conflict of interest as it eradicates the clarity of his role and it becomes difficult to place him in the category of critic or dealer.

For example, in issue number 4 of the *Angry Penguins* journal, published in 1943, John Reed’s dedication to the artists he represents can be determined as he reviews the ‘Anti-Fascist Exhibition’. Whilst the exhibition itself is discussed and described, there is no critiques made nor is there any room for constructive criticism. The article merely praises Reed’s inspired artists. The praise begins with the works of Noel Counihan before moving on to Tucker, John Perceval and finally, Nolan. Attached to the article are works by the artists and although names are given, there are no titles.

Reed’s review here marks the forming together of stages 2 and 3 of Bowness’ theory. The way in which Reed analyses the works places him in the role of the critic however as an informed contemporary reader one is able to ascertain Reed’s ulterior motives for so avidly supporting the works we know he finances.

Additionally, in the December issue of 1944, a year after the ‘Anti-Fascist’ show, a similar instance can again be observed. Tucker is listed in the contributor’s section and is given an exceedingly complimentary description. Understanding that Reed was in partnership with Max Harris in publishing the magazine, one can assume that there was a certain level of bias attached in its dispersal. Tucker is described as “one of the leading figures in the Contemporary Art Society” and placed as a key figure in the Angry Penguin

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90 (Bowness, 1989) p. 21
91 (J. Reed, 1943)
92 (J. Reed, 1943)
93 (“Contributors,” 1944) p. 109
group given the number of “art-political” articles he had published in the journal.94

Having noted that the critic does not discuss art in order to create alliances, let us now discuss the role of the dealer. For the dealer, it is in their best interest to create a friendship with the artist.95 An established relationship between an artist and dealer can lead to fruitful opportunities for both, as the artist attains a market for their art and the dealer does well to listen to the advice of the artist regarding new talent and trends.96

Bowness believes that affluent partnerships are formed given that the dealer and the artist are like-minded people, allowing friendship to blossom. Bowness states, in regards to dealers, “Those who promote the new and unfamiliar play a valuable and creative role.”97 Bowness employs examples such as Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler to demonstrate his argument, which centres on the innovation and passion of a dealer. In his argument, Bowness believes that the most amiable qualities a dealer can have is passion and innovation; possessing these enables them to carry their artists to great levels of success.98

Having considered Reed as a critic of Tucker’s works, let us now consider how he went about accomplishing the role of the dealer. To begin with, it is important to note that a number of artists that were thought to be full of promise and worth were aided financially be the Reeds during the modern movement as it took place in Australia.99 For example, Sidney Nolan and of course, Albert Tucker. Residing at their homestead in Heidelberg (now Heide I at The Heide Museum of Modern Art) the Reeds came to be important figures of patronage during the 1940s.100

As such, there is a level of intrigue that surrounds the pair and the cultural influence they possessed. For this reason, a large part of the literature that discusses this period of art places a keen emphasis on their standing and

94 (“Contributors,” 1944) p. 109
95 (Bowness, 1989) p. 39
96 (Bowness, 1989) p. 42
97 (Bowness, 1989) p. 39
98 (Bowness, 1989) p. 39, 42
99 (Hughes, February 14th - 16th, 1994)
100 (Hughes, February 14th - 16th, 1994), (Mollison, 1990) p. 26
importance in the arts scene. The interpersonal relationships between various artists who visited Heide are often queried in interviews, such as those conducted by Robin Hughes, Janine Burke and James Mollison.

Whilst most sources note the stature of the Reeds, emphasising the importance they had on the Australian culture cultural scene, Heathcote is exceptionally critical. In A Quiet Revolution, Heathcote describes John Reed as being “idealistic” and “impatient” describing his character as one with no aptitude for public relations or socialising.\(^\text{101}\) Heathcote also claims that within the modern movement the Reeds were not all that popular, stating that “many considered them misguided dilettantes who were supporting bad art.”\(^\text{102}\)

Indeed, the relationship between Tucker and the Reeds was an unusual one. The Reeds were exceptionally interwoven with Tucker’s personal affairs; John and Sunday adopted Tucker’s son Sweeney in 1949 and in later years paid for the funeral of Clara Tucker, Albert Tucker’s mother, because the artist was not able to afford the cost of the ceremony.\(^\text{103}\)

Nevertheless, the Reeds were involved with Tucker’s art for a number of years. The Reeds were concerned with a new cultural life for Australia and Tucker was very much part of this scheme. Without his innovative Modern Evil series, it is unlikely their hopes for a new strain of Australian art would have been possible. From before the Modern Evil series began, to when Tucker was living and working abroad, the Reeds continued to grant Tucker a stipend in order to aid in the financing of his art.\(^\text{104}\) In return, Tucker gave the Reeds his dedication and involvement with the CAS and Angry Penguin group as was discussed in chapter one of this thesis. When Robin Hughes asks Tucker’s feelings in regard to the allowance John and Sunday gave him, Tucker responded with the following:

Well it was good, because I was paying back for it. I gave painting for it and I worked in the Contemporary Art Society

\(^\text{101}\) (Heathcote, 1995) p. 105
\(^\text{102}\) (Heathcote, 1995) p. 105
\(^\text{103}\) (Burke, 2002) p. 506
\(^\text{104}\) (Hughes, February 14th - 16th, 1994)
for it and also on Angry Penguins so in a sense it was a form of employment. So I wasn’t getting anything for nothing.\textsuperscript{105}

The commitment in this statement is very much true of Tucker’s dedication towards the Reed’s tasks. As has been discussed, Tucker was president of the CAS in 1943 and again between 1945 – 1947. Alongside this Tucker often contributed to the Angry Penguins journal, perhaps his most well known essay being ‘Art, Myth and Society’. Interestingly, in his discussion with Robin Hughes, Tucker admits that during the height of the modern movement he never “realised the full implications” of what the Reeds did.\textsuperscript{106} It was not until many years later that Tucker fully understood the extent to which the Reeds aided in “the development of an Australian culture.”\textsuperscript{107}

In his argument, Bowness argues that innovation and fresh techniques are significant for the success of a dealer and his artist.\textsuperscript{108} To express his point clearly, Bowness refers to the work of Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler. Kahnweiler built his reputation by building friendships with the artists whom he admired such as the Fauvists (Matisse and Vlaminck were among his clients).\textsuperscript{109} Whilst Kahnweiler expanded his business to later support the Cubists (namely, Picasso and Braque) Bowness claims that he remained exceptionally loyal to those that he loved first.\textsuperscript{110} It is in this respect that I feel Bowness’ theory can be confidently applied to the relationship between Tucker and Reed.

Even long after the Modern Evil series had been created, Reed still displayed his passion for the works and the period in time that they had come to represent. In 1961, The Museum of Modern Art Australia (MoMAA) held an exhibition entitled ‘The Formative Years, 1940 – 1945’. Of Tucker’s works, Modern Evil, No. 2 (1943), Figure 6, Modern Evil, No. 6 (1944), Figure 7,
Modern Evil, No. 27 (1946)\textsuperscript{111} and Modern Evil, No. 28 (1946), Figure 8, were all displayed alongside other iconic works by Tucker such as The Futile City (1940).\textsuperscript{112} Exhibiting these works 20 years later stands to act as a reminder for the general public and for the arts industry of what an iconic period in Australian art Reed had been so active in developing. This is reiterated in the exhibition catalogue:

Undoubtedly, the years 1940 -- 1945, which we have chosen for this exhibition, were the vital years for this movement, and, so far as Melbourne is concerned, these four artists were among the major figures.\textsuperscript{113}

The exhibition marked the period that Reed was most proud of in his career, and hence why the show was organised a number of years later. Bowness’ theory of loyalty is highly applicable here as Reed obviously felt attached to the period of time that the pieces represent. The fact that there were 4 works from the Modern Evil series displayed accentuates the value Reed felt this period held. Other exhibitions that Reed later presented, showed fewer Modern Evil works and instead became focused on Tucker’s landscape work.\textsuperscript{114} Clearly Reed understood the value of the series and its importance for Australian art.

It was 11 years after ‘The Formative Years’ that Sweeney Reed, the son whom Reed adopted from Tucker, exhibited the Modern Evil series in their entirety for the first time.\textsuperscript{115} Although the exhibition has been elaborated on in the first chapter, it is important to reiterate the importance that it held here. The fact that Sweeney Reed chose to exhibit the works strengthens the theory of Bowness and the idea that dealers stay passionate to those who they had an attachment to first. Although Sweeney Reed was not Tucker’s initial dealer,

\textsuperscript{111} We can only assume that Modern Evil, No. 27 was created in 1946 as Modern Evil, No. 30 is stated to have been made in that year as well. Avent marks No. 27 as being missing – few accounts and sources refer to this work and No. 27 is commonly missed out on lists of the series.
\textsuperscript{112} (J. Reed, 1961)
\textsuperscript{113} (J. Reed, 1961)
\textsuperscript{114} (J. Reed, 1960)
\textsuperscript{115} (Henshaw, 1972)
his relationship with John Reed suggests that the dedication towards Tucker’s *Modern Evil* series had been transferred.

To conclude this chapter, it is important to recognise the way in which Bowness defines the second and third stages of success, revolving around the role of both the dealer and the critic. For Tucker, it seems that both were intrinsic in the success of the *Modern Evil* series as John Reed often took on the role of being both his dealer and his main critic.
Chapter Three

Tucker’s return to fame: The secondary reception of the Modern Evil series

“I think it takes about twenty five years for the truly original artist to win public recognition. In the first ten years or so the work is too uncomfortable for it to be accepted.”116 – Bowness

The fourth and final stage of Bowness’ theory denotes public acclamation, a commodity which reveals whether or not an artist can truly be considered famous.117 In this segment of the theory, Bowness alleges that the artist must be in the later stages of their career given that the obstacles encountered to get to this stage take a number of years to overcome. When an artist is first creating works, Bowness believes that the pieces are “too uncomfortable for it to be accepted”, however, this changes over time.118 It is this element that I am particularly keen on analysing in this chapter; at what point exactly did Tucker’s works become accepted, and what influenced the change in attitude towards his Modern Evil series?

This chapter aims to examine the secondary reception of Albert Tucker’s Modern Evil series at length. In his ‘Conditions of Success’ argument, Alan Bowness claims that after an artist has surpassed the first three stages towards success, the fourth will then follow, this being recognition from the public. As stated in the quote above, Bowness believes that it takes a number of years before an artist can be truly appreciated. In relation to the Modern Evil series, the gap between the series initial exposure and its showcase years later will be discussed, noting the many factors that contributed to their later reception.

Firstly, Tucker’s art market will be discussed and the sales of his works at auction will be considered in relation to Bowness’ claim that commonly, at

116 (Bowness, 1989) p. 49
117 (Bowness, 1989) p. 47
118 (Bowness, 1989) p. 47
least twenty-five years after they began, wealth and fame are the final stage in the career of a modern artist. The first part of this chapter aims to present a broad understanding of Tucker’s reception throughout his career, analysing how his works were received as they entered the primary market and comparing this to how his works were thought of twenty-five years after their production and initial display. Figures presented by Roger Dedman will be employed to illustrate the bridge between the initial and secondary reception of the works, along with primary sources such as exhibition catalogues. Changes in the Australian art market will then be examined as many developments that took place within the local market impacted the way in which the Modern Evil series was received. Specifically, the disintegration of artistic societies will be considered, along with the embracing of international techniques and a growing emphasis on the artist as an individual. Finally, Tucker’s personal experiences overseas will be discussed. Particular encounters that Tucker had abroad impacted his reputation in Australia and ultimately influenced the secondary reception of the Modern Evil series.

Let us first analyse the breach between the receptions of the Modern Evil series. The fact that Tucker’s pieces were so blatantly unrewarded in their time lends an emphasis on the time in which they were well received; the 1980s. In an edition of Art and Australia in 2004, Roger Dedman discusses the alternating prices of Tucker’s work. In 1988 a small gouache from the Modern Evil series sold for $30,000 against its estimate of $5,000 - $7,000.119 A decade later in 1998, a watercolour from the Modern Evil series (15.5 x 11cm) sold at Sotheby’s for a total of $28,750 despite the fact that it was estimated to sell at only $7,000 - $10,000.120 Dedman notes that these works are fairly small and asserts that if a larger piece from the Modern Evil series were to come onto the market today, it could most likely be expected to surpass Tucker’s current auction record of $662,500.”121

It is important to briefly note that only a few pieces from the Modern Evil series were sold at auction, which also emphasises their rarity and

119 (Dedman, 2004) p. 280
120 (Dedman, 2004) p. 280
121 (Dedman, 2004) p. 280
importance. Many of Tucker’s works that reached the salerooms and continue to do so are those that feature birds. Works depicting parrots, brolgas and ibis have an increased level of accessibility against those from the *Modern Evil* series, which obviously have a sense of rarity and thus do not obtain the high prices that the *Modern Evil* images do. Moreover, there are few images from the *Modern Evil* series on the market, as most of the larger oils are kept by the NGA.

Placing the *Modern Evil* series next to Tucker’s name over a decade after which they were created, it is somewhat easy to note that the secondary reception of the works highly contrasted their introduction to the primary market, this being the first time that the works were exhibited. The gap between receptions is in fact so diverse that Dedman claims that it is the date rather than the style of an Albert Tucker work that determines the pieces wealth. Considering then that the *Modern Evil* series was Tucker’s first body of work, the series remains arguably his most worthy series given the date in which they were created. Despite this, when pieces from the *Modern Evil* series were first exhibited, few critics paid much attention to them, as has been discussed in previous chapters. For example, in the CAS exhibition of 1944, Tucker displayed six works from the *Modern Evil* series. Clive Turnbull, reviewing the exhibition for *The Herald*, gave no comment on Tucker’s work. Instead, the critic focused much of his attention towards the work of Sidney Nolan, not citing any of Tucker’s *Modern Evil* imagery. Furthermore, in an edition of the *Angry Penguins* journal in 1944, Paul Haefliger reviewed the same exhibition. Although there was one illustration of a *Modern Evil* painting published in the broadsheet, Haefliger does not mention Tucker at any point and instead concerns himself with Tucker’s contemporaries.

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122 (Dedman, 2004) p. 280
123 (Dedman, 1996) p. 23
124 (Dedman, 1996) p. 23
125 (Avent, 1996) p. 4
126 (Dedman, 2004) p. 280
127 (Burke, 2002) p. 255
128 (Burke, 2002) p. 255
129 (Haefliger, 1944)
The disregard of Tucker in these instances is redeemed by Patrick McCaughey, who wrote ‘Hale and Heide’ for The Age newspaper in 2006. McCaughey’s article is filled with despair at the lack of recognition that Tucker and his contemporaries endured for so long.

In ‘Hale and Heide’, the NGV is debased for not purchasing works by any of the artists from the iconic modern movement until 1981. The exhibition ‘Rebels and Precursors: Aspects of Painting in Melbourne 1937 – 1947’ that took place in 1963 at the NGV is used as an example to illustrate the lack of recognition of the modern movement and its artists, in particular, Albert Tucker. Displaying more than 150 works from the period McCaughey claims that virtually all the pieces were available for sale and were offering prices that were extraordinarily cheap, nevertheless, the NGV still did not purchase any of the works. The fact that the NGV refused to buy any of Tucker’s pieces when they were selling for affordable prices illustrates Bowness’ point very clearly – that it is not until twenty-five years after a works creation that they are truly considered acceptable amongst the general public. Tucker may have been selling successfully during the 1960s however he did not receive sizable payouts until the 1980s and did not sell to an Australian institution until well after the Modern Evil series was created. Taking into account Bowness’ 25 year theory, one can begin to understand how it takes a number of years before an artists’ art enables them to acquire success in terms of wealth or fame. This is very much true in the case of Tucker.

Before discussing how Tucker’s time abroad affected his career, one must first analyse the changes that went on within the Australian art market, which also had an impact on the success of the Modern Evil series. Annette Van den Bosch’s publication The Australian Art World, Aesthetics in a Global Market, highlights a number of the developments that took place in the market in a cohesive way. Van den Bosch describes the permeation of American

130 (McCaughey, 2006) p. 3
131 (McCaughey, 2006) p. 2
132 (Bowness, 1989) p. 42
133 (Dedman, 2004) p. 280, (McCaughey, 2006)
techniques, describing the increased importance of solo exhibitions, the emergence of large auction houses and the arrival of more commercial galleries.\textsuperscript{134} Artistic societies began to fade out as dealers such as Georges Mora opened commercial spaces, in Mora’s case, Tolarno Galleries.\textsuperscript{135} The Necessity of Australian Art also discusses the importance of commercial galleries, claiming that their emergence meant artists were assessed more on their performance within the market rather than by fellow society members as had long been the case for Tucker.\textsuperscript{136} Furthermore, such changes led to an increasingly sophisticated approach to the dealing and selling of art; Van den Bosch claims that dealers were operating as “bankers”, keeping a number of works in the galleries storeroom in order to make private sales with increased prices.\textsuperscript{137}

The disintegration of artistic societies can be observed through an examination of Tucker’s catalogues over the years. Tucker’s catalogues illustrate a steady move away from group shows and a rise in solo exhibitions, reiterating the emergence of American techniques. Before departing overseas in 1947, Tucker exhibited works only in accordance with the CAS as stipulated in the first chapter of this thesis. Living and working abroad Tucker became exposed to the concept of solo exhibits, which showcased purely his work.

For example, ‘Albert Tucker’, which was showcased at Hirschl & Adler Galleries, New York, in 1960 soon before Tucker was due to return to Australia. Fred Ringel wrote the foreword in the exhibition catalogue and depicts Tucker as being an ambassador for Australian art, stating that his works may seem “bizarre” to American audiences because the pieces represent “the first mature statements from an emerging new cultural entity.”\textsuperscript{138} Following this exhibit was another solo show in London, from where the rest of his journey home to Australia would continue. Waddington Galleries in Mayfair displayed Tucker’s works however the response towards the works did

\textsuperscript{134} (Van Den Bosch, 2005) p. 3, 48, 56  
\textsuperscript{135} (Van Den Bosch, 2005) p. 48  
\textsuperscript{136} (Burn, 1988), p. 58  
\textsuperscript{137} (Van Den Bosch, 2005) p. 48  
\textsuperscript{138} (Ringel, 1960)
not match that of Ringel in New York.\textsuperscript{139} Nevertheless, Tucker’s resume continued to grow and his biggest solo show was about to begin in Australia as will soon be discussed.

Emerging, international market concepts within the Australian art market resulted in a higher regard for international judgements and opinions. Van den Bosch believes Australian buyers to be influenced by the reputation of an artist abroad, before purchasing their work.\textsuperscript{140} Therefore, not only were Australian galleries and dealers adopting techniques from New York, they were also appropriating their opinions. In light of Australia’s impressionable nature, Van den Bosch claims Australian buyers are “unadventurous” when it comes to buying art, as they are too concerned with the opinions of others.\textsuperscript{141} Therefore, when it comes to analysing the career of Albert Tucker, one can only assume that such attitudes highly affected him and clearly influenced his reception when back in Australia in an exceptionally positive way.

Having noted the importance placed on international regard and techniques, let us now return to Tucker’s time abroad and the event’s that profoundly affected the Modern Evil series reception in the secondary market. Three major sales took place in New York that greatly affected Tucker’s reputation and prominence as an artist. In 1957, The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) purchased Lunar Landscape (1957), Figure 9. Later, in 1960, MoMA acquired Explorers: Burke and Wills (1960), Figure 10 and in the same year The Guggenheim Museum bought Antipodean Head (1958).\textsuperscript{142} Between two American museums, Tucker had sold three works of art before any Australian gallery had offered to buy his work. In fact, before he left Australia for Europe and America, Tucker left four pieces of work at the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), in the hopes of the gallery acquiring a piece.\textsuperscript{143} However, despite their inexpensive prices, the paintings were all returned to John Reed in a few

\textsuperscript{139} (Gleeson, 1979) p. 44
\textsuperscript{140} (Van Den Bosch, 2005) p. 62
\textsuperscript{141} (Van Den Bosch, 2005) p. 62
\textsuperscript{142} (Hughes, February 14th - 16th, 1994), (Burke, 2002) p. 357, 358
\textsuperscript{143} (McCaughey, 2006), p. 1
weeks and it was not until after galleries in New York had bought works from Tucker that the NGV did too.\textsuperscript{144}

When Robin Hughes asked Tucker if his time in New York gave him confidence, Tucker confirmed that it had. Observing the attention and praise that Tucker received in America, on a personal level, it is easy to see how confidence would have blossomed. Tucker cites experiences such as meeting Alfred Barr to Hughes, and talks of his success in New York with excitement; his sentences become merged and he jumps between topics, eager to explain it all.\textsuperscript{145} Similarly in his discussions with Burke, Tucker reveals details about his time in the United States. Tucker claims that he found the open-minded nature of Americans to be refreshing as it was so different to the attitudes that he had encountered in Europe.\textsuperscript{146} Bowness' statement is highly applicable here, as he states that during their early years, some works are “too uncomfortable for it to be accepted.”\textsuperscript{147} For Tucker, this was most certainly the case in London.

In London Tucker had been rejected various times because of his works and their style.\textsuperscript{148} Tucker confided to Burke that the British desired to have old traditions reworked in new ways and thus why he was able to find more success in New York.\textsuperscript{149} Gavin Fry also notes this in his account and cites a letter Tucker had written to Nolan. In it, Tucker describes his rejection in London and claims that only one gallery gave helpful advice – “Mayer and Mayer Galleries was more specific ... you won't sell here. Go to Paris, Brussels, America – you'll find a market there.”\textsuperscript{150} Indeed he did. By the end of 1947 Tucker had moved to Paris where he stayed for four years and created pieces that were in theme with the \textit{Modern Evil} series.\textsuperscript{151}

After selling works of art to prominent institutions in New York, something in Tucker shifted, as became clear in his next exhibition. It was

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{144} (McCaughey, 2006) p. 1
\textsuperscript{145} (Hughes, February 14th - 16th, 1994)
\textsuperscript{146} (Burke, 2002) p. 363
\textsuperscript{147} (Bowness, 1989) p. 49
\textsuperscript{148} (Bert and Ned, The correspondence of Albert Tucker and Sidney Nolan, 2006), p. 73
\textsuperscript{149} (Burke, 2002) p. 363
\textsuperscript{150} (Fry, 2005) p. 113
\textsuperscript{151} (Fry, 2005) p. 114
\end{flushleft}
soon after selling the pieces in New York that Tucker was due to return to Australia. In collaboration with The Museum of Modern Art Australia (MoMAA), Tucker toured with an exhibition of his works from the 1950s entitled, quite simply, ‘Albert Tucker.’\textsuperscript{152} Tensions between Reed and Tucker were high throughout the organisation process, as Tucker was keen to employ all that he had learnt about selling works overseas.\textsuperscript{153} Namely, Tucker wished to attach international prices to his works to which Reed strongly disagreed.\textsuperscript{154}

Tucker had been carrying hostile feelings towards the Reed’s for some time. Perhaps the argument regarding prices was a permeation of the anguish he had been carrying over the years. During the 1950s, when Tucker was living in Europe and away from all ties to Melbourne and the CAS scene, he confided in a letter to Nolan:

> The Reeds, who had appeared so cosmopolitan, so sophisticated, during the previous decade, looked increasingly provincial, looked into an anachronistic version of history, a memory of things past that was oppressive and unreal.\textsuperscript{155}

The time that Tucker spent in New York most likely fed these thoughts, especially given the momentous sales that he made in his time there. Upon his return to Australia, it seems likely that Tucker was fighting to not regress in levels of success, hence why he was so adamant about the figures attached to his works in his touring exhibition and would not back down to Reed, who to seemed so inferior to him at that time. Eventually Tucker won the debate, and to Reed’s surprise, many pieces sold for high prices.\textsuperscript{156} Despite any misgivings Reed may have had, the following was stated in the exhibition catalogues foreword, emphasising the importance of Tucker’s international stature:

\textsuperscript{152} (J. Reed, 1960)
\textsuperscript{153} (Fry, 2005) p. 189
\textsuperscript{154} (Burke, 2002) p. 363
\textsuperscript{155} (\textit{Bert and Ned, The correspondence of Albert Tucker and Sidney Nolan}, 2006) p. 15
\textsuperscript{156} (Burke, 2002) p. 364
Many artists, including Albert Tucker, have felt obliged to leave Australia because of [a] lack of recognition, so it is with special pleasure that we welcome him back as our distinguished guest.\textsuperscript{157}

Describing Tucker as a ‘distinguished guest’ exaggerated the idea that he had found success overseas and was now returning home to assert this. Other sources support this claim, specifically, that Tucker’s sales to established institutions altered his return to Australia, and heightened his standing as an artist. Writing for ‘Albert Tucker: The Endurance of the Human Spirit’, at Lauraine Diggins Fine Art Gallery, Diggins notes that selling \textit{Lunar Landscape} to MoMA was what inflated Tucker’s reputation, and with it, the reputation of his works.\textsuperscript{158} Similarly to Diggins, Van den Bosch believes Tucker’s work to be deemed “the most collectible” due to his reputation among high profile galleries and museums.\textsuperscript{159}

The secondary reception of the \textit{Modern Evil} series shifted Albert Tucker into Bowness’ fourth stage of success. Bowness’ belief that it takes a number of years for an artist to be truly appreciated is supported by Tucker’s \textit{Modern Evil} series and their reception a number of years after their creation.

In the time between when the works were created and when they were taken to be ‘successful’ on the art market, a number of developments took place that played an important role in their secondary reception. Importantly, the Australian art market grew in ways that aided in the sale of Tucker’s works; a greater emphasis was placed on international techniques and opinions. Given that the secondary reception of the \textit{Modern Evil} series came soon after Tucker returned from the United States, Tucker’s stature as an artist was even more elevated. Having exhibited solo shows and sold a total of three pieces of art to MoMA and The Guggenheim, Tucker came to be highly respected when he returned to Australia.

\textsuperscript{157} (J. Reed, 1960)
\textsuperscript{158} (Heathcote, 2000)
\textsuperscript{159} (Van Den Bosch, 2005) p. 184
Additionally, the general perception of the period in which the *Modern Evil* series was created had altered in the time that Tucker spent abroad, carrying the series and Tucker to success upon their secondary reception. The works in the series were given a sense of reverence and their rarity on the market lent the series a greater sense of importance. Despite the fact that the works were not that highly regarded during their days of initial exhibition, by the time the works entered the secondary market the general perception of them had shifted in their favour.

In conclusion, given the developments that took place between the initial exhibition of the series and the secondary reception of the works, Bowness’ claim that it takes a number of years for an artist to reach public acclaim and overall success is an accurate statement for Albert Tucker and his *Modern Evil* series.
Conclusion

Bowness' theory of success can conceivably be applied to Albert Tucker’s career path. The manner in which Tucker’s career developed, remains in accordance with Bowness’ stages of success. It was with the help of Tucker’s *Modern Evil* series that the artist was able to reach high levels of public acclaim during the later stages of his career.

Having graphed the movements of Tucker through Bowness’ stages of success, one is able to come to the conclusion that the *Modern Evil* series is an important element of Tucker’s resulting fame. Without such a powerful initial body of work, one must wonder if Tucker would have moved as steadily through each of the stages that Bowness stipulates. Given that the works were created during such a tumultuous time, the first stage of success that Bowness states obviously held much reverence for the resulting success of Tucker and his works.

During the end of his argument, Bowness states, “in many cases, artists never quite recover the quality of their early breakthrough period.”\(^{160}\) For Tucker, I believe this to be the case. It is of my opinion that having moved through Bowness’ four stages and reaching the level of success that Tucker did, the importance of his first collection of works, the *Modern Evil* series can never quite be matched. This statement can be observed in the fact that there are vast differences between when Tucker first created the series and the secondary reception of the works. It is therefore important to note the vast amount of research that still needs to be done in analysing the progression of the series, as it clearly marks an important chapter in the history of Australian art.

Ultimately, within the filed of Australian art history, I feel there is room for more analysis of Tucker’s early career, and needs to be recognised both in literature and in visual terms. The romance that lies behind Tucker’s later

\(^{160}\) (Bowness, 1989) p. 51
series gets pushed to the foreground of Tucker’s level of recognition. For example, Tucker’s *Portraits* series, in which bohemian faces from the modern movement come to life on his canvas. Too often the *Modern Evil* series receives only a brief mention, rather than an intensive study.

This is clearly observed in the series’ lack of public and critical recognition; there is a significant gap in the literature of Australian art history when it comes to recognising the importance of the *Modern Evil* series. Given that the *Modern Evil* series is so often referenced in art literature as being unique and one which represents “a genuinely original contribution to Australian art”, it is significantly understudied.\(^{161}\) The same accounts that praise the *Modern Evil* series are also quick to move their discussions forward, swiftly changing the focus to the latter part of Tucker’s career.\(^{162}\) Given the extensive amount of writing by established scholars on the Australian modern movement, I feel it is a disappointment that the same facts are often repeated and little attention is paid to the earlier part of Tucker’s career.

Furthermore, the supposed importance of the *Modern Evil* series that these accounts state, the series is vastly underappreciated visually. In 2011, the *Modern Evil* series will have been displayed in their entirety only twice. The Heide Museum of Modern Art intends to borrow the works from the NGA for a period and display the pieces together for the first time since 1972. The exhibition, to take place between late March and late July of next year, will focus on many aspects that were discussed throughout the course of this thesis such as the lack of recognition that the series has received. Overall, the exhibition will focus on the reception of the series in the 1940s, noting the way in which praise for the series came much later in Tucker’s career.

Additionally, although the majority of the series is in possession of the NGA, a predominant part of the works reside in storerooms, available for viewing only upon request which again, emphasises a lack of acknowledgement of the series. Only three works from the series are on permanent display, *Modern Evil, Demon Dreamer* (1943), *Modern Evil, Spring

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\(^{161}\) (Dedman, 1996) p. 24

\(^{162}\) (Fry, 2005), (Mollison, 1990), (Perkin, March, 17th, 2007)
in Fitzroy and Modern Evil, No. 24. Comparatively, Sidney Nolan’s Kelly series are on permanent display as a group and even have their own wing dedicated to their presentation.

For an artist who travelled through all the challenges a modern artist must endure, the importance of his first body of work is highly undervalued and I hope that with more accounts similar to this thesis, and with more contributions by curators such as Lesley Harding, the Modern Evil series will become increasingly appreciated within Australian art.
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Illustrations

Figure 1


National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Figure 2

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Fry, G. Albert Tucker: Beagle Press, 2005, p. 59
Figure 3


National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Fry, G. *Albert Tucker*: Beagle Press, 2005, p. 57
Figure 4

*Modern Evil, No. 24, 1945.* Albert Tucker.

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Fry, G. *Albert Tucker:* Beagle Press, 2005, p. 61
Figure 5


National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Fry, G. *Albert Tucker*: Beagle Press, 2005, p. 77
Figure 6


National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Fry, G. *Albert Tucker:* Beagle Press, 2005, p. 44
Figure 7

*Modern Evil, No. 6, 1944.* Albert Tucker.

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Fry, G. *Albert Tucker:* Beagle Press, 2005, p. 40
Figure 8

*Modern Evil, No. 28, 1946.* Albert Tucker.
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Fry, G. *Albert Tucker:* Beagle Press, 2005, p. 81
Figure 9


Figure 10