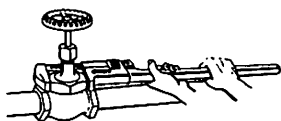


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# PLUMB

TOOLS FOR MODERN LIVING



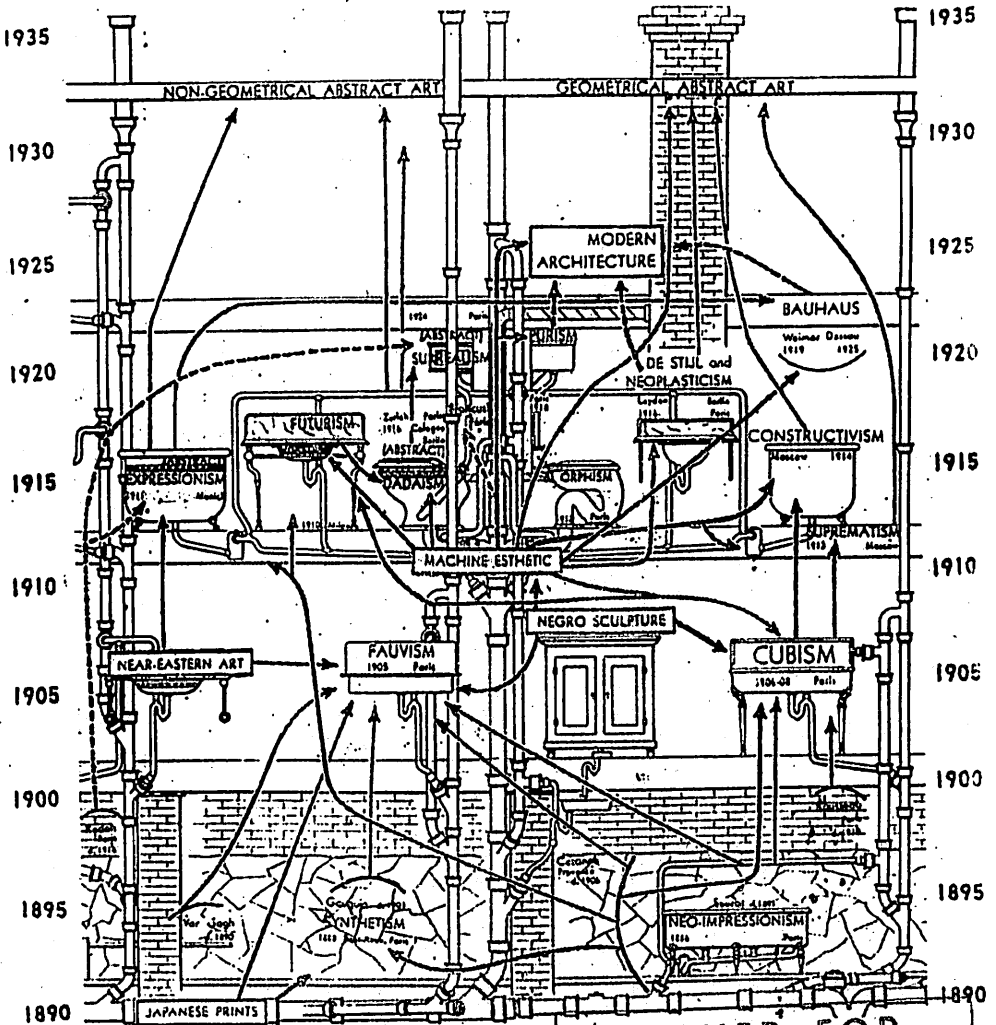
Margaret Morgan

Artspace

September 14 - October 15 1995



BARR/LOOS:  
PORTRAIT OF A HISTORY OF MODERN ART AS SANITARY SYSTEM



or: A Place For Everything And Everything In Its Place  
(The house that Adolf and Alfred Built)

CONSTRUCTION

DATE 26/16/17S. SIGNED *Morgan*

# PLUMB

Margaret Morgan



## Tools For Modern Living

Modernism is a house. Lines are drawn. Four walls are erected. Plumbing is laid. The tools are dispersed. Chalk-marks are dusted away, their purpose to designate placement now redundant. Orderly, upright, rational, the house is in place. No untrammelled desire infects this system. Neither trace of the builder's trespass nor the leaking of unseemly fluids will sully its seamlessness. Witness that the house persists, is maintained and does not go away. Witness also that the house does not merely remain, but that it gleams, is glistening, scrupulously clean, clean like the too well wiped surface of a murder weapon. Incriminating evidence. A body of evidence. This house is the house that Adolf and Alfred built, one more construction from the master plans. If this were a film script, my characters, Adolf and Alfred, might know one another, share each other's banter, live in each other's pockets. They might have a mutual friend called Marcel. But in the homosocial annals of the art history from which they come, there is no room for either the mingling of fluids or the touching of flesh to flesh, only, instead, the congregating of certain men and, from time to time, their honorary representatives. In art history no closets are opened. Adolf and Alfred touch only in the minds' eye. Adolf and Alfred remain in their sanctioned historical places. There they solemnly stand, in the privacy of that public place, that water closet, either side of R. Mutt's urinal, staring straight ahead, conversing obliquely from the corners of their mouths, talking about plumbing, anyone's plumbing, anyone's but their own. As Catherine Hall has observed of other modern men:

In a social world [19th century Britain] in which identity was always defined in relation to 'others', the 'others' of this manly independent individual were the dependent and the subjected - the woman, the child, the servant, the employee, the slave - all of whom were characterised by their personal dependence. Here, indeed, were the roots of the connections between the bondage of womanhood and of slavery....In reality, this *independent* man was himself dependent on those around him: his wife who managed the household and ensured his comfort, his servants who did the work within the household, tended the garden and cared for the children, and his employees whose labour was essential to the running of his enterprise.<sup>1</sup>

But there is a further complication: I was born in this house. I live here. I work here. I am here because of it and it because of the likes of me. Just as a totalising view of the 'other' is an inadequate descriptive model, so too is a model which totalises modernism. As the culture of modernity, I have too much invested in some of its foundations to discard it wholesale. It means too much to me. Feminism is borne of it, so too Unionism and Civil Rights: Some of modernity's bourgeois entitlement has rubbed off. I am still attached to these, the meta-narratives at which a post-modernist might sneer. And the reception of modernism, as its ideologies and aesthetics travel the globe, always produces a mis-take and this gives me pleasure. I find my fantasies there. It gives me things to play with. What I am interested in doing is sully the distinction between these axes, the constraining and the pleasing, the modern and the post-modern, the pleasures of order and the pleasures of the

perversions of order. And order is very perverse.

In fin de siècle Vienna, Adolf Loos, the architect, designer and modernist par excellence, advocated the twentieth century artist throw down the brushes, easels and muses of the past and instead take up the clean, rational efficiency of the industrial *zukunft* and follow the lead of the plumber. Across the Atlantic and some four decades into the future, Alfred H. Barr, then Director of New York's Museum of Modern Art, designed a descriptive model for his seminal exhibition entitled *Cubism and Abstract Art*, which, in a frenetic bid to have 'a place for everything and everything in its place', made of culture a flow chart. My *Portrait of Modern Art As Sanitary System* articulates the kinship of these rhetorical positions by overlaying Loos' illustration of ideal modern plumbing with Barr's flow chart of modern art. In a sense, by taking up my wrenches and DWV pipe, as I have been doing since 1993, I am taking Loos and Barr at their word. Yet by inserting the pictorial and the narrative, those most a-modern of artistic forms, I am also trying to suggest the very occlusions upon which their premises rest and the limits of their aesthetic form. These arguments inform the installation of *Plumb* at Artspace. In the centre of the gallery from post to post is a gridded structure, a cube of plumbing. Located in the middle ground between the walls and the plumbing are gleaming sheets of glass, etched with images taken from 'official' versions of events. Leaning on the outer walls at the edges of the gallery are four paired panels of plaster board. Upon these, figures are drawn in blue builder's chalk. They are fugitive, unstable and readily erased. The images are based upon family albums or the occasional 'minor' painting. With each drawing is a hand written story, oblique, anecdotal and dense like poetry. The stories, of precisely three hundred words length, are fictionalised accounts. Neither true nor plumb, this body of work refuses its name. My intent here is to imbue a sense of plausibility, not verité. Together the pictures and stories configure subjects whose status is construed as marginal but whose existence, none the less, is central to a history of modernism. Incompletely under the sway of a hegemony that constructs them, the figures of my imaginings are active, desiring and with an agency to act upon the very machinations of their own manufacture.

### Every Tap And Plughole Is A Mark Of Progress

That plumbing is exemplary culture, that the modern artist should aspire to the plumber, and that modern art can be understood as a diagram of controllable flows, these are tenets of a project of such mammoth idealisation and such ubiquitous repression as to have failure a built-in feature. Indeed, it is no coincidence that modernism can be described as a series of crises. Yet seldom in the fray do we glimpse the bodies of the modernist subject: in all things, cleanliness, rationalism, purity. No wonder their bodies are hidden. And no wonder their speech is rife with the barely contained and unctuous flows they obsessively sought to control. (Did you know that the extreme flooding of agricultural plains in the US is actually a direct consequence of progressivist engineering's desire to make rivers straight?) Of course modernism, of the European and North American kinds, is neither dispassionate nor rational, disinterested nor neutral. But it takes a lot of nervous energy to pretend to be so, to perform, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick would say, its alibi of abstraction. Modernism is driven compulsively from movement to movement (so to speak), caught in the double bind of its own performative relation to the embodiment of subjectivity (it represents), and in relation to its denial of the bodies of those upon whom it is utterly dependent. As Stuart Hall has said: Modernism is modernity experienced as trouble.<sup>2</sup> Its rhetoric is as shot through with bodily double entendres as the vocabulary of a fitter and turner (see inside covers). And in this the rhetoric of modernism has much in common with that of modernity, despite the ostensible separation of these spheres.

Both modernism and modernity, art and industry, subscribe to a telos that puts the present and Mankind at the pinnacle of progress. Positing plumbing as the penultimate modern culture, Loos argued that:

Next to the academies we should build baths, and along with the professors we should appoint bath attendants. A higher standard of culture will have better art as its consequence<sup>3</sup> ...The plumber is the pioneer of cleanliness. He is the State's top tradesman, the quartermaster of civilisation - the civilisation that counts today. Every [English] tap and plughole is a mark of progress.<sup>4</sup>

And his industrial successors in the US concur:

It is hardly an exaggeration to summarise the history of four hundred years by saying that the leading idea of a conquering nation in relation to the conquered was in 1600 to change their religion; in 1700 to change their laws; in 1800 to change their trade; and in 1900 to change their drainage.<sup>5</sup>

The same engineer concludes his essay with this quote from J.C. Stobart, 'The Glory that was Greece':

Let no cultivated reader despise these details (lavatories, sinks, sewers, manholes). There is no truer sign of civilisation and culture than good sanitation. It goes with refined senses and orderly habits. A good drain implies as much as a beautiful statue. And let it be remembered that the world did not reach the Minoan standard of cleanliness again until the great sanitary movement of the late nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup>

Though neither a good drain nor a beautiful statue, I am born of modernity, raised in modernism. Child of late capital, at the end of the twentieth century, I witness the persistence of the past, the desire for order, the persistence of capital, the modern period still in our midst. I also witness my desire for representation, for equity and for some of the grand narratives of modern emancipation, though this is certainly too modest a forum for the further discussion of such things. I also witness the manufacture of my consent. My acquiescence implicates me. I find myself both inside the house and outside the house. In the shelter of its lee I find succour and in its kitchens and bathrooms, I keep order. I am a good girl. We are inextricably tied, bound up with one another. About this I am profoundly ambivalent and since canonical art history doesn't recognise ambivalence, I must record it myself. I learnt an art history full of places for me, not as marginalia, but smack-dab in the thick of it, right at its heart. I heard my name and the names of my friends and family invoked often in its pages. I was at home there. I still am. And though this home is *unheimlich*, it gives me comfort. Vestiges of my own ghosts and the ghosts of art history live on there.

1. Catherine Hall, 'The Economy of Prestige: Thomas Carlyle, John Stuart Mill and the Case of Governor Eyre', *Cultural Critique*, Spring 1989, 170 - 71

2. Stuart Hall, 'Ethnicity: Identity and Difference', from a speech delivered at Hampshire College, Amherst, Massachusetts, Spring, 1989

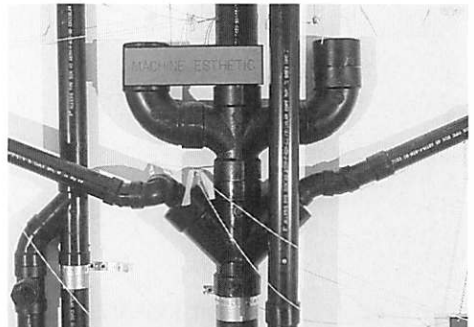
3. Adolf Loos, *Spoken into the Void*, Cambridge, MA: 1982, MIT Press, p. 45

4. Ludwig Munz, *Adolf Loos, Pioneer of Modern Architecture*, London: Thames and Hudson, 1966, p. 221

5. Abel Wolman, 'The Sanitary Engineer Looks Forward', *Water and Sewerage Works*, Nov. 1946, Vol. 93, #11

6. Abel Wolman, op. cit.

detail from  
*Too Much Leverage Is Dangerous* 1994  
installation including plumbing, audio track,  
building materials, cabinet, wall texts  
approx. 5 m<sup>3</sup>



Margaret Morgan



They were swollen from unrelieved pressure and incorrect usage. They were my hands and I was no tradesperson. Bearing what my pectorals and biceps could not, my hands suffered each misguided fit and turn. To me leverage was an abstraction; it was only at the end of the job I began to understand, at a bodily level, that control was infinitely more subtle than brute force. Joints grinding, body in torsion, the wrench a dull lump in my pocket, I learnt the lessons of the unskilled. My father, so my mother told me, had been highly skilled. She kept his tools as homage to as much, maintaining them just as he would have liked: oiled, wrapped, neatly ordered, a place for everything and everything in its place. She kept them with the rest of his things in a large suitcase in the linen closet in the hallway. It was always in darkness, this place, because you didn't need to go there, and because to turn on the light would have been a waste. Sometimes, surreptitiously, I would open the suitcase that housed his things. I would flip through his books, never reading, only looking, looking for the pressed flowers he'd left for someone to find there. I'd fondle the brittle leather of his shaving case, unzip it to inspect the razor within. I'd turn the handle of the bitless screw driver, weigh the hammer in my hand, gingerly finger the sharp edge of the plane. Those tools are still with me. I carry them in the cavities of my body. You know, Audre Lorde is wrong: They are not the Master's Tools, they never were, a tool is a tool is a tool and it belongs to me as much as anyone. I want something more than an old saw.

Digitally altered anonymous photograph  
with inset illustration for Adolf Loos  
'Plumbers', Vienna, 1898  
from *Spoken into the Void*  
Cambridge, MA: 1982, MIT Press

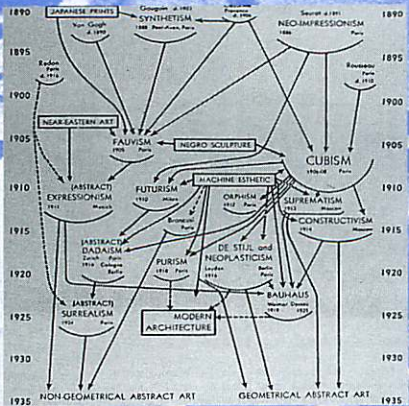






Today was the day. No more pencils, no more books, it was Muck-up Day, the last day of the last year of school. Wet lipped, he anticipated his final achievement. A simple lever, a novel construction, for such things he had aptitude. For once, he'd come first. On points alone, he knew he'd win: the element of surprise, the elegance of the design, his forward planning. He knew the other boys would approve. He savoured the prospect of his spectacular deployment, the shells cracking, the yokes flying, a sulphurous miasma filling the cubicle. He rehearsed his strategy, checking the set-up, testing the pulley. At last his prey entered the adjacent stall and, suppressing squeals of glee, he let go, releasing the hidden cord that propelled his load onto the target. Obligated to retaliate, grinning wildly and with albumen still dripping from his eyes, his friend thrust his head down the toilet, flushing as he pushed, convulsing in paroxysms of delight and revulsion. They tumbled in that confined and vertiginous space, losing their bearings, falling against gravity, slipping in the spills of their own undoing. It didn't matter that by mid-morning their uniforms were ruined. They were meant to be ruined, this their final denouement. They knew it was the last time they'd ever need to wear them. Smearred with flour, egg and unnamable concoctions from the bathroom, they wore their dishevelled garb like revolutionaries, the clumps of sticky poultice their badges of honour, its smears of yellow and brown, bruises from battle. Summer, already bleaching the sky white with heat, had cooked the mucky glue onto their clothes and faces, making cracks and fissures with each gesture or movement, leaving dissolute trails in their wake as they ran from the school yard at the three o'clock bell.







Margaret Morgan

From under the door, a crack of light interrupted the darkness. If you stared for long enough its violet afterimage would blink round the room, fading only as your gaze returned to the slides you were meant to be watching. The room seemed cooler for being in darkness and the projector's whirring reassured you, its sound a mechanical ballet. You were never lulled to sleep. You had too much invested in red squares and red rooms and the crop the Gleaners were harvesting. You desired the Fife Player, little boy and woman as he was, in the same way, you surmised, as the historian who lauded him. You returned the stare of Manet's model and you liked to imagine her bullfighting. Years later the blonde lashes of a friend would recall those of the model and, like a crack of light, the image would float before you. Your gaze scanned these surfaces, looking for your reflection in the folds of red drapery, the oscillating fields of colour, the impossible monument to the Third International. In that classroom at lunch time, you burned with the pleasure of your knowledge, of your familiarity with the subject, of the place for you in its lexicon. In many ways you were relieved there'd been no room in that working class curriculum for such frivolities as art. You were only too happy to be far from the usual social intercourse of the classroom, the boys' mucking up, the girls' cigarettes. A sanctuary for fantasy, that extracurricular space became home. It was only later, at art school, that most non-vocational of endeavours, that you learnt the contingency of your imaginings. In a place where your class and gender distinguished you, your accent and manner betrayed you as not belonging but for your status as metaphor.

Digitally altered *Portrait of Victorine Meurent*, Edouard Manet, Paris, 1862 from Pierre Courthion, *Edouard Manet*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1962 with inset cover design for exhibition catalogue, Alfred H. Barr, *Cubism and Abstract Art*, Museum of Modern Art, New York 1936 from Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference, Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art*, New York: Routledge, 1988



**The Plumber Protects the  
Health of the Nation**



*American Standard*



Margaret Morgan

It dripped. The flesh of the upper arm barely concealed a well developed muscle beneath. She pushed. Up and down, each thrust of rhythmic motion turned her face a deeper shade of purple, forcing her breath from her body, making her sweat. Her ears rang. Gorged with blood, each capillary filled to bursting. She plunged deeper, then with less depth but greater speed, each motion a perfect seal between the rubber of the apparatus and the steel below. The trap was open, she had thrust its lid aside herself. This palpitating flesh was not the flesh of orgasm, the lips of this woman weren't ecstatically apart. Rather it was a woman, my mother, in the throws of temper, her mouth quite shut, a slit of a line to hold in her rage. I remember watching, motionless and at some distance, the ammoniac fumes still searing my nostrils. 'It's those tampons', she said, 'those bloody tampons'. Were I one of those sharp-witted, precocious adolescents I might have punned on her indignation. Instead I stood there dumbfounded and humiliated, watching as the plunger disgorged gob after gob of my guiltiness from the bowels of the house at the back of the yard. This was the gully trap, the big drain that connected our net to the street and the larger system. This was not the dusty storm water channel that my girlfriend and I, at a younger age, had crawled through during the drought. This was the wet drain, the one in use, the one between my mother and I. Tampons, I never use them now. I don't like them. They inhibit my flow. I like to see what I bleed. And as for those stupid cylinders of cardboard with which to shove them up, I'd take my finger any day.

**MARGARET MORGAN**

Born Sydney, 1958

**Education:**

- 1994 Master of Fine Art, University of California, Irvine  
 1991 Whitney Museum of American Art, Independent Study Program  
 1984 Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts), College of Fine Arts, University NSW

**Individual Exhibitions:**

- 1995 *Plumb, Tools for Modern Living*, Artspace, Sydney, New South Wales  
*Western Painting*, Gallery 482, Brisbane, Queensland  
 1994 *Western Painting*, William Mora Galleries, Melbourne, Victoria  
*Too Much Leverage Is Dangerous*, Fine Arts Gallery, U. C. Irvine, California  
 1993 *Fixtures, Modern People, Places, Things*, Fine Arts Gallery, U. C. Irvine  
*Guildford-Liverpool-Penrith/Modernity*, Space YZ, University Western Sydney  
*Portraits of Modern Men (Lest We Forget)*, William Mora Galleries, Melbourne  
*Domestic Moderne*, Women's Resource Center, U. C. Irvine, CA  
 1992 *A Hung Jury*, William Mora Galleries, Melbourne  
*A Little History*, William Mora Galleries, Melbourne  
 1991 *from A Hung Jury*, Mori Gallery, Sydney  
 1989 *Rhyme and Reason*, Mori Gallery, Sydney  
*In Love and Language*, Canberra School of Art, Canberra, ACT  
 1988 *the place I see you*, installation, Dance Theatre Workshop, New York, NY  
 1987 *Between the Lines*, Jon Gerstad Gallery, New York  
 1986 *Lovers Leaps*, Mori Gallery, Sydney  
 Untitled, Avago Gallery, University of Sydney  
 1984 *Peggy Went to Market*, Mori Gallery, Sydney  
 1982 *Baguette and Vegemite*, Drew Gallery, Canterbury, England  
 1981 *Urban Exclusive*, Mori Gallery, Sydney  
 1980 *Views of the Suburbs*, Mori Gallery, Sydney

**Selected Group Exhibitions:**

- 1995 *The Smorgan Collection*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney  
*Working Girls*, Campbelltown City Art Gallery, Sydney  
*In The Company of Women*, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, WA  
*Non-Criminal Criminals*, Hyde Park Barracks, Sydney  
*Persona Cognita*, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne  
*Bodily Functions*, Hanes Art Center, University of N. Carolina, Chapel Hill, NC  
 1994 *Interaction of Science and Art*, University of Hong Kong, HK  
*Focus, Women Over the Past Hundred Years*, Adelaide Central Gallery, SA  
*Far Bazaar*, Foundation for Art Resources, the Brewery, Los Angeles, CA  
*Indigestion*, Fine Arts Gallery, University of California at Irvine  
*Superwoman*, Fine Arts Gallery, University of California at Irvine  
 1993 *Out Auction*, LA Gay and Lesbian Community Services Center, Los Angeles  
 1992 *Ten Steps*, Horodner-Romley Gallery, New York  
 1991 *Her Story, Images of Labour in Australian Art*, S.H. Irvin Gallery, Sydney  
*Frames of Reference, Aspects of Feminism and Art*, per Artspace, Sydney  
 Moët and Chandon Art Fellowship, Australian National Gallery and touring  
 1990 Untitled, Momena Gallery, Philadelphia, PA  
*Post - Hype*, 88 Room, Allston, Massachusetts  
*The Complex Picture*, College Gallery, South Australian College, Adelaide, SA  
*The J-Curve*, George Paton Gallery, University of Melbourne and touring  
 1989 *Irony, Humour, and Dissent*, Manly Art Gallery, Sydney, and touring  
 1988 *The Naked City*, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide  
*No More Blue Horizons*, Flaxman Gallery, London, England  
*From Margaret Preston to Margaret Morgan*, Art Gallery of WA, Perth  
 1987 *Anti-Ego Show*, Minor Injury Gallery, Brooklyn, New York  
*Australian Drawing: the Eighties*, Australian National Gallery, Canberra  
*A New Romance*, Australian National Gallery, Canberra  
*Domestic Contradictions*, Power Gallery, Sydney and touring  
 1986 *The Repeated Image*, Brisbane Civic Art Gallery and Museum, Brisbane  
*Forbidden Fruit*, First Draft Gallery, Sydney  
 1985 *Australian Perspecta*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney  
*Heartland*, Wollongong City Gallery and touring  
 1984 *Soft Attack: Artists Against Militarism*, Artspace, Sydney  
 1983 *Australian Perspecta*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney  
 1982 *Urban Images*, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney

**Prizes And Scholarships:**

- 1994-3 Humanities Research Grants, Office of Graduate Studies, U. C. Irvine  
 1991 Moya Dyring Studio, Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, AGNSW Sydney  
 1987 Greene Street Studio, New York, VACB of the Australia Council  
 1983 Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council Project Grant  
 1982 Cité Internationale des Arts Studio, Paris, Power Institute, U. Sydney  
 Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council Project Grant  
 Dyason Bequest, awarded by the Art Gallery of New South Wales  
 1981 University of New South Wales Travelling Art Prize

**Collections:** National Gallery Australia, Canberra; Art Gallery NSW, Sydney;..Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth; Wollongong City Art Gallery, NSW; Campbelltown City Art Gallery, NSW; Liverpool City Art Gallery, NSW; Newcastle Region Art Gallery, NSW; Banalla Regional Art Gallery, Vic.; Griffith U., Brisbane; UNSW, Sydney; U. Sydney Student Union; U. Qld, Brisbane; Artbank, Australia; Private collections in Australia, UK, USA



**Selected Professional Experience:**

- 1996-5 Visiting Faculty, California Institute of the Arts, Valencia, California  
 1995 Lecturer in Painting, Dept. Visual/ Performing Arts, University of Western Sydney  
*A Little History*, Gallery Talk, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney  
 Invited Guest Lecture, School of Art, Cal. Arts, CA  
 Invited Guest Lecture, Graduate Seminar, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY  
 1994 Lecturer in Painting, Dept. Visual and Performing Arts, UWS, Sydney  
 1994-3 Research Assistant to Catherine Lord, Chair, Dept. Studio Art, UC Irvine, CA  
 Teaching Assistant Consultant, UC Irvine, CA  
 1993 Visiting Fellow, Research Directions Scheme, VaPA, UWS, Sydney  
 Guest Lecture, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, Sydney  
 1989 Artist-in-Residence, Lecturer in Drawing, Canberra School of Art, Canberra  
 Invited Guest Lectures: Sydney College of the Arts, UWS, City Art Institute, Syd.;  
 Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Melb.; Canberra Institute of Arts, ACT  
 1986 Lecturer in Painting, Fine Arts Department, University of Sydney  
*No Smoke*, public lecture, Lectures Program, Sydney Biennale  
 Painting Workshop/ Lectures, Northern Rivers College, Armidale, NSW  
 1985 Lecturer in Painting, Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney  
*Heartburn*, public lecture, Heartland forum, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney  
 1985-4 Committee Member, Artworkers' Union, Sydney  
 1984 Board Member, Artspace, Sydney  
 Lecturer in Painting, University of Western Sydney

**Publications By Margaret Morgan:**

- 1995 'Helen Grace', *Photofile*, Sydney, November  
 'Mathys Gerber', *Art + Text* 51, April  
 1994 'From DaDa to MaMa', *Binocular*, Moët and Chandon Edition Contemporaine  
 'Toward a Minor Nation', *Art + Text* 50, December  
 'Jacky Redgate', *Art + Text* 50, December  
 'This Portrait Which Is Not One', *Persona Cognita*, catalogue, MoMA, Melbourne  
 'Bad Girls West', *Art + Text* 48, Winter  
 Cover illustration, Moya Costello, *Small Ecstasies*, University of Queensland Press  
 1993 'Ian Burn', obituary, *Art in America*, December  
 'Bob Flanagan, Visiting Hours', *Art + Text* 45, Fall  
 1992 'A Year for Women: Kiki Smith and Sue Williams', *Art and Text* 44, Summer  
 'The Very Idea, Susan Norrie at Nancy Hoffman Gallery', *Eyeline* 17  
 'Daring or Incorrect?', with Frazer Ward, 'Letters', *Art in America*, June  
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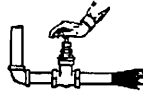
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