

**THE KEVIN PAPPAS TEAR-OUT POSTCARD BOOK AND ALL AUSTRALIAN GRAFFITI.  
(UNATTRIBUTED PRESS RELEASE WRITTEN BY RENNIE ELLIS, 1977).**

All Australian Graffiti is an independent graphic design and illustration studio which suddenly people are talking about. At a time when so much of our visual communication is clean, precise and slick and looks like it all developed from the same humourless mould, Graffiti have dared to be different. It's not that the seven illustrator/designers have a similar graphic style but rather that they've successfully promoted and capitalised on an attitude that gives a gentle nudge to those canons of the Australian lifestyle which most people either ignore or take far too seriously. Football, the beach, suburbia, the Queen, the Holden car and the kangaroo have all been given the Graffiti treatment in the studio's first offering to the public. THE KEVIN PAPPAS TEAR-OUT POSTCARD BOOK, the latest release from Penguin Books. Many of the postcards in the book were originally mailed to potential clients as self-promotion pieces by the studio. Such was their reception that it was decided to make them available as a collection.

While the cards, like many of Graffiti's creations, are blatantly irreverent, the humour is born of affection for a peculiarly Australian identity rather than any distaste for our way of life and its symbols.

The youthful founders of All Australian Graffiti, Mimmo Cozzolino and Con Aslanis arrived in Australia as products of the government's immigration programme. In common with many migrants they have had to try to come to terms with the peculiar schizophrenia of living a double life -the prevailing pressures of Italian and Greek culture rooted in their family environment, and the day to day realities of the Australian lifestyle they faced at school and in the streets. This kind of cultural dilemma is quite unappreciated by Australians born here.

Part of Mimmo and Cons' rationalisation was to examine the core of their Australian experience and mentally register those symbols that meant Australia to them- things like the corner milk bar, the Holden car, the kangaroo, etc. As Con says, "Those sorts of things are part of our culture as far as I'm concerned. I like them, I grew up with them so I had to like them."

Now it's these symbols that manifest themselves in much of the humorous drawing of All Australian Graffiti which in itself has expanded to accommodate a Polish Jew, an Englishman and three home grown Australians.

The team with Mimmo and Con are Tony Ward, who once taught them both, Izy Marmur, Geoff Cook, Neil Curtis and Meg Williams, who in turn was a student of Mimmo and Cons'. All of them are possessively individualistic yet share a great sense of camaraderie in their efforts to "revert attention back on our environment at a specific level." Next year their work will receive world wide exposure through *Graphis*, the famous international graphic design magazine.

The studio's group consciousness is expressed by a symbol of its own in the form of Kevin Pappas, a gentleman who looks Greek but has kangaroo legs and tail and now enjoys a certain amount of notoriety around the ad agency scene.

"When we started the studio", says Con, "we felt a funny kind of prejudice along the lines of 'what do these two wogs know about Australia anyway.' That's more or less disappeared now we've established ourselves but it forced some adjusting by us, which was O.K. because we've been doing that ever since we arrived in Australia."

"We've tried to harness our special view of Australia as migrants and let it come through in our work", adds Mimmo. "And we try to see the more human and humourous side of things and use it as a way of communicating visually to people. We reject the Swiss school of design as being sterile and not-in-keeping with how we react to Australia."

THE KEVIN PAPPAS TEAR-OUT POSTCARD BOOK draws on nostalgia and a sense of a modern Australian folk culture rather than jumping on the current band-wagon of ockerism. There is vulgarity and wit and finely observed social insights. As Con says, "trying to understand my environment was something I had to do for my personal survival, not only as an artist but also as a communicating human being. I must be aware of what's happening around me. Like for instance the plastic footy in backyards that over the last 10 years has replaced the real football."

All Australian Graffiti readily admit to a commitment to preserve and resurrect those symbols and signs that reflect what they see as the original Australian identity. An identity they feel is being obliterated by the homogenising effects of imported American nastiness. One of their most popular posters is a display of pre-war Australian trademarks which Mimmo researched and dug up from the "never to see the light of day again" bins.

"These sort of symbols represent groups of thought of people within society", explains Con. "They really have the flavour of Aussie, something we, as migrants, are very aware of because they're so different. They're unlike anything that comes out of America or Europe. There's a provincial quality about them, a kind of naive beauty. We appreciate their graphic curiosity but they're also important for what they say about this country. They contribute to a national identity that's fast disappearing."

### **Con Aslanis.**

One of the All Australian Graffiti originals, Greek-born Con bounces around the studio beaming with bonhomie. While his wisecracks never dry up, his audience of fellow workers sometimes does in which event he lapses into merry dialogue with himself. For someone who once taught art (cake decoration) to trainee chefs at the William Angliss Trades School, Con has achieved a remarkable degree of international recognition. In 1972 he designed a type face he named, with typical Graffiti humour, Yarra. Along with hundreds of other designers around the world he submitted it to Letraset and was one of the 12 winners in the famous company's international typeface competition. The Yarra face became available around the world as a special Letraset face.

Con also received an award from the New York One Show for his contribution to the Qantas book which set the travel promotion business on its heels.

"It doesn't matter how bloody good you are on technique, if you don't have the ideas you're nowhere", Con emphasises. "The concept behind the craft is what counts if it's

going to communicate". The Kevin Pappas symbol of half kangaroo/half Greek immigrant which is now synonymous with All Australian Graffiti, was originally Con's idea and design.

### **Geoff Cook.**

For many people, cricket devotees and interested persons alike, one of the highlights of the Centenary Test was Geoff Cook's now famous cricket poster. The marvellous green and white illustration showing hundreds of cricketers performing on the field is now stuck to the walls of cricket clubs around the world. The cricketers who played in the memorable game, clamoured for extra copies of the poster to give to their colleagues in the field. Five thousand copies were printed and it is still selling. Not only was the poster a masterpiece of satire and hilarious cartooning, but also a very fine example of graphic design which communicated on several levels.

The poster was a follow-up to Geoff's greatly acclaimed tennis poster showing a legion of tennis courts receding into infinity, each containing some sort of bizarre activity. Like the cricket poster, one is continually discovering new happenings in the complex design.

Geoff's hot dog postcard which All Australian Graffiti used as a promotional piece before it was made available to the public via the postcard book was also a hit. A big demand for it followed the first mailing and even included a request from a collector of hot dog memorabilia in the United States. The card shows a typical Australian beach scene with the sun worshippers depicted as animated hot dogs. This summer, a similar illustration will appear on a Scotties tissue pack.

Geoff, also a graduate of Prahran College Art School, has worked for two of Melbourne's outstanding design studios before joining Graffiti. "It's only since joining Graffiti some two and a half years ago that my own personality as an illustrator evolved. Graffiti allowed me the latitude to do what I really wanted to. Here I could indulge my fantasies", says Geoff, giving one of his infectious grins. "We've had good clients like Hang Ten who've given me a completely open brief to do something to capture people's attention. I think All Australian Graffiti is doing something that hasn't been done before in Australia. It's a new attitude to illustration exemplified by the Post Card book".

### **Mimmo Cozzolino.**

All successful organizations need a front man and at All Australian Graffiti that role has fallen to Mimmo Cozzolino. Mimmo, a graphic design graduate from Prahran College and later a teacher at Preston Institute, has forsaken the drawing board to play entrepreneur, studio manager and on-the-road rep for his less practical charges. It's said he can often be seen striding meaningfully along St. Kilda Road (Melbourne's own Madison Avenue) with a "meanwhile back at the studio" look on his face. In a more serious vein he says, "I initiate a lot of the work out of the studio while I convert energy into action into the studio".

Mimmo came with his family to Australia from Italy in 1961. After completing tech. school he began studying engineering before changing over to graphic design. He graduated and worked in an advertising agency art studio for a year and a half, where he was well schooled in production. He left to freelance with Con Aslanis, who he knew from Prahran College, and All Australian Graffiti was born. After a sojourn overseas they returned to

rekindle the creative fires of Graffiti. With the arrival of new personnel, Mimmo became the business manager and spokesman for the group, a job he does with great enthusiasm, a very necessary ingredient to overcome an initial resistance to the group's non-conformist work. Now that Graffiti has made its mark, he expresses concern that people only come to them when they want really unusual illustrations and ideas and omit to give them the bread and butter work.

### **Neil Curtis.**

In 1973 Neil Curtis, then a final year art student at Preston Institute of Technology, won the Art Directors' Club gold medallion for Melbourne's Student of the Year. The award's committee, made up of some of Australia's best advertising art directors and graphic designers, also made the comment that while Neil's work was superbly innovative, it was also so idiosyncratic as to make him virtually unemployable. His commercial potential was dubious, they said. "I just wanted to draw pictures", Neil remembers. "I saw my kind of illustration as a bridge between fine art and design". The lean years after art school saw Neil find acceptance for his work in the underground press but the more conventional agencies shied away from him.

While the decision not to compromise his style kept him poor in the beginning, it's now starting to pay off as a number of adventurous agencies are harnessing his peculiar brand of creativity. His forthright manner, his penchant for story telling and his eccentric but warmly realised illustrations have found their niche at All Australian Graffiti and he is now trying to adjust to the idea of his work being accepted.

### **Izy Marmur.**

Born in Poland, Izy arrived in Melbourne in 1962 aged 14, and suffered his first attack of culture shock, a condition that has shaped his attitudes and artwork ever since. Having been processed through Prahran College Art School along with his other Graffiti colleagues, he found himself doing retail layouts for McEwans, a job that while reasonably secure in its tenure, didn't offer Izy the chance to fully explore his talents.

He took off for the other side of the world where he was a graphic designer in England and a waiter graduating to chef in Germany. Unable to get a visa to Poland, he arrived in Jerusalem by default where he stayed for a year, working as head man in a design and illustration studio.

Izy found a wife, learnt to come to terms with the "business is business" ethic and then headed back to Australia. "Thought I'd check out what was happening back on the home front". McEwans snapped him up again. "We need you Izy" they pleaded, but the re-union, as pleasant as it was, could not withstand the poaching efforts of his old school mates, Con the Greek and Mimmo the Italian. "We solved everything one evening over a few drinks," Izy recalls. "We got together to create something our minds could handle. All Australian Graffiti is special for me because I know we're different. I can experiment and I'm with friends which is very important to me.

"The postcard book is our way of showing how we relate to Australia. Where we've been and where we're going-the changes. I believe it's important that the migrant contribution

to Australian culture is recognised". The observation can be made, that in some ways the Graffiti migrants are more basically Australian than native born Aussies. They're the ultimate product of unsubtle suburbia and the milk bar syndrome.

### **Tony Ward.**

Tony Ward enjoys (?) the distinction of being an ex-movie star, which is something of an unusual claim for a person who has made a substantial name for himself as an illustrator of the offbeat, or as his friends tend to put it, an offbeat illustrator. Back in 1969, Tony played the lead in Phillip Adam's first film, a short feature called *Jack and Jill*, which, despite its low budget, was to win some of the major Australian film awards of its time. The role of Jack, a mood bikey from the wrong side of the river, is difficult to reconcile with the Tony who fills the role of *eminence grise* of All Australian Graffiti.

For five years he was a lecturer in the graphics department at Prahran College where two of his more promising students were Mimmo and Con, the founders to be of All Australian Graffiti. Tony still sees the mantle of teacher as one he wears with grace and one cannot discount the influence of his style and attitudes on his present colleagues. Over the years his amusing and ironical drawings which gave form to the wondrous imaginings that hovered around behind his eyes, earned him a special reputation amongst his peers. In 1976 he received an Award of Excellence from the New York Art Directors' Club One Show, for his illustrations in the Army, Navy and Air Force Nursing brochure.

Tony thinks of himself as a painter working in illustration, but is quick to point out that visual communication is only one ingredient of the marketing mix. "I like to use my art as a method of making something else happen. I love to be involved in marketing and its associated configurations. And I like the idea of taking humour as a serious business".

### **Meg Williams.**

Meg Williams survives as the only female member of All Australian Graffiti. At tech. she was taught by both Mimmo and Con and they hired her as an illustrator as soon as she graduated. She lasted a week then left, lacking confidence and motivation. It took her nearly three years, during which time she did occasional freelance jobs, before she got it together and rejoined Graffiti where her distinctive illustrations of "funny people in funny situations which may be very common, ordinary everyday scenes" have added substantially to the studio's repertoire.

"Working at Graffiti is very satisfying for me", she enthuses, "it's very relaxed- you're allowed to write on the toilet walls and you can have apple cores on your desk. It's a bit more lively, a bit more gutsy than other places. I think at Graffiti were trying to get away from the superficiality of recent design, and for professional reasons I really enjoy working amongst other illustrators. I think it's the only place I could work".

Meg's postcard of the Kevin Pappas family enjoying dinner in their Greek/ Australian kitchen was the first Graffiti postcard to go through the mails.