



The *From Bonboniere to Barbed Wire* mural (Figure 41), painted over several months from 1985 to 1986, portrays a wide cross-section of women and compares the various roles they perform. It is painted on the Gas and Fuel building situated at the corner of Smith Street and Queens Parade in the inner Melbourne suburb of North Fitzroy. The mural presents the argument that it is a diversity of character from which the 'general woman' of the feminist movement is comprised. Painted by Megan Evans and Eve Glenn at a time when the main thrust of the movement was for female equality, it was all too possible to lose sight of the fact that the needs of this vast group were more disparate and complex than was apparent in the hold-all phrases adopted. As the mural illustrates, the elderly woman has requirements that are very different from those of the middle-aged and the black woman. Their needs and aspirations are different again from those of the wife who works in the family greengrocer's, and can be at odds with those that will advance the cause of the young white woman pursuing a business career. In relation to all of these, the imprisoned woman, who is referred to as living behind barbed wire in the mural title, has quite specific desires and obligations. All these types are visible in the crowded, multicultural Fitzroy streets surrounding the mural. The message that appears on the screen at the top of the painting: 'Sisters are doing it for themselves' — taken from the Annie Lennox hit song that was popular in the mid-1980s¹ — optimistically asserts that women are not only ignoring male oppression, they are refusing to wait for the necessary change to be brought about in the predominantly male institutions that would normally control their advancement.

Besides such political aims, community artists are concerned to create more than a simple slogan, and therefore aspire to a level of sophistication appropriate to the work being designated as art. While recognising this objective, the art style chosen is almost always figurative. Art historian Sandy Kirby has argued that a contributing factor in this representative approach lies in attitudes formed in the 1930s and 1940s, when social realism — the realist style with a political inclination — was chosen as the vocabulary through which the process of change via art was most effectively articulated.² Realism is also the most apt medium for the self-descriptive element that is a significant feature of community art, and which parallels the interest that arose in the 1980s in written local social histories. Both historical and artistic views were symptoms of the egalitarian position that art was not the exclusive domain of the élite. Another important influence was the splintering of every aspect of the art system, as postmodernism and its complicating mission took effect. In recognition of the fact that art can be made by anyone, anywhere, through multifarious thought patterns, the new post-modern system became less strictly hierarchical, and new career channels emerged. Australian society as a whole became more

FIGURE 41
Megan Evans and Eve Glenn, *From Bonboniere to Barbed Wire*, 1985–86, Gas and Fuel building, Smith Street, North Fitzroy, Melbourne. Photograph: John Brash

