



BREAKING NEW GROUND

Brisbane Women Artists of the Mid Twentieth Century

Breaking New Ground examines the contributions of six female artists in changing the Brisbane artistic landscape. Artists featured are:

- Margaret Cilento
- Pamela Macfarlane
- Margaret Olley
- Betty Quelhurst
- Joy Roggenkamp
- Kathleen Shillam

These women were born in the 1910s and 1920s and grew up in a very conservative period but each established and maintained a successful career as an artist despite many challenges. Significantly, this pushing of boundaries and desire for independent careers has paved the way for future Brisbane female artists. The exhibition follows on from the widely popular show *The Brisbane Line: Queensland Women Artists of the Early Twentieth Century* which QUT Art Museum presented in 2003, to examine the impact of nine women artists born in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, who flourished in the years between the wars.

BRISBANE IN THE MID TWENTIETH CENTURY

During the mid-twentieth century Queensland's art and cultural life was seen as very lacking. Brisbane art was viewed as parochial, insular and unoriginal, the result of years of conservative, authoritarian, anti-intellectual politics which existed under both Labor and Conservative governments. Queensland's mineral wealth was growing with the discovery of coal and other natural resources which forced development in transport and communication and created strong employment. Culturally though, Queensland was homogenous, conformist, and Brisbane as the capital city, was viewed as a big country town.

Unlike Sydney and Melbourne there was little immigration to Brisbane, meaning that it lacked the cosmopolitan flavour of the Southern cities. It also lacked the infrastructure such as comprehensive town planning, adequate roads, port facilities, water supply and sewerage systems.

Opportunities for art education in Brisbane were also extremely poor. The chief training base in Brisbane was *The Central Technical College* but it was a rigid, outdated institution with a redundant curriculum based on the post World War I era.

Despite all of this there were many prominent artists and writers in Brisbane at this time.

In 1951 Robert Haines, a graduate of Courtauld Institute of Art in London, was made director of the Queensland Art Gallery. He brought vibrancy to the collection with the addition of early 20th century European modernist works. His successor was former West Australian Gallery Director, Laurie Thomas who engaged new audiences and grew the contemporary collection, including the holdings of work by Australian artists.

In addition to the development of the State gallery, commercial galleries began to crop up in Brisbane, and give artists the opportunity to show and sell works. As well as this a number of art historians and artists from overseas and interstate who had relocated to Brisbane, shared their knowledge and passion of the arts giving talks at the Queensland Art Gallery and offering private tuition.

MARGARET CILENTO

- Her work reflects her time studying overseas but also has a strong regional vernacular influenced by her time in Queensland
- She was a very important figurative painter
- Clear mix of European classicism and modernist principles in her work
- Whilst overseas Cilento embraced avant-gardism and she used this opportunity to extend her work and become quite experimental
- She was involved with the creators of Abstract Expressionism in America and also worked alongside some of the great names of Surrealism

An unswerving dedication to art led Margaret Cilento on an extraordinary journey through life. Her formative years as an art student were spent in Brisbane and Sydney during the 1940s. She then travelled and studied overseas, first to New York and Paris where she actively embraced the burgeoning avant-gardism of these cities, and then to London where, in the mid 1950s, she met leading contemporary British artists. Her overseas studies came at a crucial period when modernism was being reinvigorated by the European classical tradition. Cilento eventually brought back to Australia this new classicist style. Despite her interest in abstraction, Cilento never abandoned her predilection for figuration. Her art is a dynamic synthesis of these two disparate modes and, at its finest, is infused with strong modernist impulses.

Margaret Cilento grew up in Brisbane and studied at Sommerville House with her friend Margaret Olley. She began her study in Brisbane but in 1943 moved to Sydney to continue her study at East Sydney Technical College under some highly esteemed art teachers. She was then awarded a Queensland Wattle League Travelling Scholarship and she went to study in New York. There she studied printmaking at Atelier 17 under progressive British printmaker S. W. Hayter to work on innovative intaglio techniques. Here she worked beside many other expatriate artists including Salvador Dali, and she shared a desk with Joan Miro. Cilento was the only major Australian artist to be influenced by the New York school at the height of its development in the late 1940s.

In late 1949 Cilento left New York for Paris where she was awarded a French scholarship to study at the re-established Atelier 17 there. Cilento was heavily influenced by Pablo Picasso's work, which she experienced in Paris. In 1951 Cilento returned to Brisbane, and was concerned her work would suffer in uninspired Brisbane. But she continued to thrive, her teaching of abstraction and modernist belief helped move Brisbane forward and keep her engaged. She also had solid exhibitions at this time in Brisbane and Sydney. 'The Immigrants' (1951) and 'David Cilento Reading' (1951) are key pieces which reflected her two years in Europe but with a local inflection. Both works are clearly indebted to Picasso's monumental figurative style.

In mid 1954 Cilento went to London to continue her study at The Central School of Art and Goldsmiths College. 'Self Portrait in Black' (1958) is one of a series of three self portraits she painted in London, it has a strong element of pattern and evokes her study of Spanish artist Juan Gris' work and synthetic cubism. In 1965 she returned to Australia, settling down in Melbourne where she took a hiatus for many years. Later in life she returned to her art with 9 solo exhibitions from the 1980s until her death in 2006 at the age of 82.



David Cilento reading (c. 1951) oil on canvas.
QUT Art Collection.

MARGARET OLLEY

- Olley's use of colour, depiction of commonplace objects, and detailed figures have made her one of Australia's most revered painters
- Still life and interior subjects are her forte
- She travelled extensively, and during the time period this exhibition covers, she was very interested in the tropics and created a lot of work based on the colour and light of this region
- Olley was friends with many other famous Australian artists - Russell Drysdale, Ian Fairweather, David Strachan, Donald Friend, Margaret Cilento - and was often influenced by their works

Margaret Olley remains a prominent and endearingly eccentric personality, deeply respected by fellow artists and critics as well as by Australia's social and cultural elite. A bon vivant, traveller and benefactor, she is above all an exceptional artist whose painterly vision over more than half a century has given rise to a significant oeuvre. Still life and interior subjects are her forte, which she interprets through paintings that pulsate with light and colour. Reflecting the rich labyrinth of her domestic world, Olley's work celebrates art, life and the indefatigable spirit of a remarkable woman.

Olley was born in Lismore in NSW in 1923. In 1937 she was sent to Sommerville house where she met Margaret Cilento and began a friendship that would span a lifetime. It was at Sommerville House that Olley began to explore her artistic talents and after school she decided to continue her artistic study. She began study at Brisbane's Central Technical College, but found it conformist and disappointing. She then went to study at East Sydney Technical College where her passion and talents grew. In Sydney Olley met and befriended many other young Australian artists of this time including Donald Friend, Russell Drysdale and David Strachan.

In 1947 she began to win prizes for her work, and in 1948 she had her first solo show at Macquarie Galleries in Sydney which received good reviews. Following this exhibition the Art Gallery of NSW and the National Gallery of Victoria purchased works. One of her most famous works *Portrait in the Mirror*

was part of this exhibition, and it displayed her talent for depicting everyday objects such as fruit and flowers.



In 1948 she was the subject of two important portraits. William Dobell's Archibald prize entry depicted her wearing a very eccentric frock and attracted much interest for Dobell's work and for Olley. Russell Drysdale also painted Olley that year adding to her prominence at the time.

Portrait in the mirror (1948) Oil on cardboard. Art Gallery of New South Wales. Copyright Margaret Olley

From 1949 to 1953 Olley travelled to Europe and visited museums and galleries there to immerse herself in the European art scene. There she met famous artists such as Chagall and writer Alice B. Toklas. In 1953 her father died and Olley returned to Brisbane.

Upon her return she began designing sets for the Twelfth Night Theatre, and her home called 'Fardon' became a favourite place to stay for visitors from interstate and overseas. She then travelled to Northern Queensland and to New Guinea and found herself inspired by the tropical colours, the light and the nature in these regions. The paintings she produced whilst in New Guinea were exhibited in Macquarie Galleries in 1955 to much acclaim. After this exhibition though Olley found herself struggling with painting, and so instead concentrated on drawing for the next five years. In 1959 she opened an antique shop in Brisbane expressing further her love of commonplace and beautiful objects.

It was at this time that she was recovering from a major drinking problem. She had developed a close association with Johnstone Gallery in Brisbane and her good friends there helped her through this period and she held an exhibition there in 1962. The exhibition included still lifes and nudes. The nudes were depictions of Aboriginal women from a South Brisbane hostel whom Olley found much more engaging to paint than models. Her work was now much more confident with a stronger use of both colour and light. Thirty-eight of her paintings were sold in this exhibition, doubling the figure for sales of any Australian female painters work in one exhibition.

The Johnstone Gallery show netted a total of £5000 and with this sum and some other resources she began investing in Sydney and Newcastle real estate, this included buying a hat factory in Paddington which later became her home. She divided her time between Sydney, Newcastle and Brisbane as well as time abroad. Between 1967 and 1968 she visited Papua New Guinea three times and was inspired by the Indigenous work there.

In the mid-1960s she essentially stopped doing figure painting and concentrated on flowers and still lifes. She gave life to flowers through her use of shape, colour and texture, capturing a rich sensuality and naturalism in her work.

In 1969 she set off travelling again and visited South East Asia including Malaysia, Thailand, Cambodia and Bali. In 1971 she undertook a three-month residency at the *Moya Dyring Studio at Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris*. En route Olley visited Bali, Hong Kong, Nepal, India, Iran, Turkey, Greece and England. Morocco and Spain were included in her return journey to Australia. She continued to travel extensively in the 1980s and 1990s, regularly returning to Paris to engage with modern French art which she held a special interest for her.

In 1990 SH Ervin Gallery did a survey of her work celebrating her extensive oeuvre. That same year the Margaret Hannah Olley Art Trust was established. Through this the artist has become one of Australia's most generous benefactors to public collections. In 1991 Olley received an honorary doctorate from Macquarie University in Sydney (the first of three such awards from Australian universities) and was also appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO). Three years later, aged 71, the artist had her first solo exhibition in London at Browse and Darby Gallery.

In 1996 Olley's work was the subject of a major survey exhibition organised by the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Following this and other public recognition, in 1997 she was declared an Australian National Treasure. In 2005 the authorised biography *Margaret Olley: Far from a Still Life*, written by Meg Stewart, was launched in Sydney. In 2006 Olley was awarded Australia's highest civilian honour, the Companion of the Order of Australia (AC), for her services to art and philanthropy.

PAMELA MACFARLANE

- Macfarlane was interested in creating a bridge between the arts and sciences
- Her analytical approach to painting was influenced by a background in the sciences (she worked as a zoologist)
- She moved beyond the constraints of the Impressionistic realism that was the legacy of Queensland artists at this time

Pamela Macfarlane was a gifted individual who possessed creative abilities that bridged the arts and sciences. She studied art from a young age but trained and worked as a zoologist. However, she chose to pursue her love of art and decided on an artistic career following a decisive trip to New York in the early 1950s. Here the rich and vibrant culture of the city had a major impact on her life. Adopting an analytical approach to painting, in part informed by her systematic observation and study of the biological world, Macfarlane went on to produce a significant body of work that has tended to be overlooked until now.

Macfarlane was an independent thinker whose inquisitiveness and intelligence generated work that reflected her contemporary cultural aesthetic and sensibility. Her importance as an artist resides in her qualities as a highly intellectual painter who espoused an art that synthesised understandings of multiple cross-disciplinary sources in the sciences – from quantum physics to Jungian psychology, Renaissance architecture to the anatomy of molluscs and metaphysics. This liberated her from the constraints of the tradition of impressionistic realism that was the cultural legacy of many of the artists active in Queensland during the interwar period.

Macfarlane was born in Dunedin, New Zealand in 1926. Her grandfather produced illuminated manuscripts and worked part time at the Otago Museum, and he instilled in Macfarlane a passion for books, art and other cultures. Macfarlane settled in Brisbane in 1948.

In 1950 Macfarlane lectured at The University of Queensland and attended painting classes at the Brisbane Central Technical College. At this time the Macfarlanes became friends of the influential Viennese émigrés, the architect Karl Langer and his wife Gertrude, an erudite art historian and critic. Through this relationship with Gertrude, a staunch advocate of the arts in Brisbane, Macfarlane learnt how to cross reference between cultures in her work.

In 1951 Victor Macfarlane was appointed visiting professor at the Downstate Medical Centre in Brooklyn, New York. Pamela accompanied him and attended classes at the Art Students League of New York. This was an artist-run school where students had no set syllabus and were able to explore and pursue different art making practices, collaborate with other artists, and regulate their own learning. This is when Macfarlane decided to leave Zoology behind as a profession and truly pursue her art.



The tea party (1956) Oil on composition board. QUT Art Collection

While in New York Macfarlane saw a major retrospective exhibition of Paul Cézanne's work which deepened her interest in the structural nature of painting. In 1952, while travelling in Europe, she explored the Provencal landscape which had so inspired this French artist. She also studied the frescoes of Piero della Francesca in Italy. The appeal of this 15th Century artist fed Macfarlane's increasing interest in Renaissance perspective techniques which complemented her earlier scientific study of the structure and physiology of animals.

In 1952 the Macfarlanes returned to Brisbane but Pamela continued her studies beginning classes taught by Margaret Cilento. Solo exhibitions of her work were held in Dunedin in 1954 and Brisbane in 1956. Her interest in Piero and Cezanne were clear in the latter show with their influence present in the key themes and symbolism of the work. The show featured a number of figurative works including the painting *Tea party* 1956 which reveals the artist's fascination with the formal possibilities of puppetry as a thematic focus. The painting is a multi-layered work which reflects the depth and complexity of Macfarlane's approach, and the state of her life at the time. In 1958, the Macfarlanes travelled again to the United States, this time via Mexico where the artist looked at works by indigenous Meso-American cultures, deepening her interest in pre-Columbian art. In New York Macfarlane studied printmaking at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn where she completed the lithograph *Puppeteer* 1958. A lyrical image of great subtlety, this print illustrates her remarkable ability as a printmaker, which was underpinned by the exceptional technical and studio resources available to her at Pratt.

After this time in New York the MacFarlanes went on to England, Spain and Portugal. In England the artist spent time studying the pre-Columbian collections at the Bodleian Library in Oxford. It was the art of ancient Mexico that appealed to her most and informed her views of painting the figure. In 1959 the Macfarlanes moved to Canberra. Pamela flourished in Canberra, finding the cultural life of the city extremely encouraging. Her work also became much better known during this time, particularly after an exhibition of her paintings at Australian Galleries, Melbourne in 1961.

By 1964 the Macfarlanes had settled in Adelaide, where their home in the Adelaide Hills, 'Wychwood', became a focus for visiting academics. The late 1960s and early 1970s were extremely productive years for the artist with major exhibitions held in Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, Dunedin and Melbourne.

Macfarlane's art at this time reflects a diverse range of intellectual concerns: the analytical psychology of Carl Jung; alchemy; mythology; and the game of chess. Chess became a central theme in her work, used to explore fantasy, transformation, and aesthetics. This subject also provided Macfarlane with the opportunity to look at formal relationships between opposites – black to white, male to female, life to death, and square to circle for example.

From the mid 1960s Macfarlane began teaching art in various Adelaide tertiary institutions: printmaking and art history at the South Australian School of Art; historical materials and methods of art at Flinders University; and art history in the architecture department at the University of Adelaide.

The early 1980s was a period of personal tragedy for McFarlane. Both her husband and mother died in 1982 and in the following year the house in the Adelaide Hills was razed in the devastating Ash Wednesday bushfires. In addition to all household possessions, she lost her studio, priceless paintings, prints and drawings, research notes and teaching materials. Following this devastation Macfarlane had to essentially start again, so seeking further intellectual stimulation, she moved permanently to Oxford in England in 1985. There she renewed her association with the work of Piero della Francesca through research focusing on the development of perspective and its links to architectural design in early Renaissance art. She died in Oxford on 26 September 1999, aged 73.

Macfarlane was a unique artist whose work explored the realms of the mind and metaphysics. In the conservative artistic environment of Brisbane in the 1950s she was a refreshingly innovative artist.

BETTY QUELHURST

- Now 87, Betty Quelhurst has an artistic career that spans 7 decades, most of which was spent painting and teaching in Queensland
- From an early interest in tonal realism under the influence of her teacher William Dargie, Quelhurst went on to develop a distinctive and vibrant realist style
- The focus of her work is often on the human figure, embodied chiefly in portraiture and beachscapes
- She developed a high profile as a painter in Brisbane in the 1950s and 1960s, but was overshadowed by the achievements of many of her contemporaries and her work has been somewhat neglected since this period



Boulevard, Paris (1952) oil on canvas board. QUT Art Collection

Betty Quelhurst was born in 1919 at Laidley, a small rural town in the Lockyer Valley west of Brisbane. In 1921, the family moved to Brisbane, and in 1935 Quelhurst enrolled as an art student at the Brisbane Central Technical College where she studied for the next four years. Her teachers included F. J. Martyn Roberts, who headed the College's Art Branch, and Cyril Gibbs, a watercolourist and graphic designer. Quelhurst recalls the course being instructive in teaching her the disciplines of drawing and design, but frustrating in that it offered no real painting classes.ⁱ

With the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, Quelhurst was forced to delay her plans for an art career, and began four years service in the Royal Australian Air Force. After the war, she was appointed a trainee art teacher at the Central Technical College and was awarded the Queensland Wattle League Travelling Scholarship.ⁱⁱ This, together with assistance under the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Training Scheme, enabled her to undertake further training, especially in painting – her preferred medium. She chose to study at the National Gallery School in Melbourne, which was then led by the distinguished portrait painter William Dargie. Quelhurst studied painting and drawing under Dargie from 1947 to 1950 and he imparted a strong sense of tonal values and exactitude to Quelhurst's work.

The award of the Half Dozen Group of Artists £150 Travelling Scholarship in 1949 enabled Quelhurst to attend the National Gallery School for an additional year. During this time she won the Hugh Ramsay

Portrait Prize and the Sara Levi Prize for the most outstanding student at the School. The nude figured prominently in her training and she created works which emphasise tone and composition as well as faithful rendition. By the time Quelhurst had completed her study in 1950, she was a highly skilled portraitist. Though portraiture was the dominant thematic focus of her early work, weekend painting excursions to rural areas around Melbourne extended her repertoire of subjects, including landscape and genre scenes.

Quelhurst's recognition as an emerging artist of potential began when her work was included in three important group exhibitions in Brisbane in 1951: 'Exhibition of Queensland Art' at the Queensland (National) Art Gallery; 'Works by Australian Painters'; and 'Younger Artists from Three States', both shown at the Moreton Galleries.

In 1951 after many years of saving Quelhurst set off for Paris, where she studied briefly at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière, one of the city's most famous art schools. The group of five watercolour and ink drawings from 1951–52 in the exhibition capture the life and spirited mood of post-war Paris. Quelhurst was clearly captivated by the charm and vitality of the city, and painted vignettes of boulevards, bridges and markets. Over a two-year period, Quelhurst backpacked in 11 countries and spent a great deal of time looking at art in major museums and galleries in Paris, London, Rome and Madrid before returning to Australia in 1953.

Upon her return Quelhurst worked briefly as a technical assistant for Dargie in Melbourne. Later in Brisbane, she set up a private teaching studio in inner-city Clayfield, and taught part time in secondary schools and colleges. She also provided adult education programs in Queensland country towns in the 1950s. Portraiture dominated her work throughout the decade; her earliest portrait commission, a half-length study of *Reverend Mervyn Henderson*, the retiring Principal of Emmanuel College at The University of Queensland, was accepted for the 1954 Archibald Prize. It was her first and only entry.

A series of paintings completed by Quelhurst between 1955 and 1960 reveals the strength and quality of her portraiture at this time. The figures in these works are intensely observed, her technique appears effortless, the paint application, colouration and textural effects, especially in the sitters' clothing and accessories, are exquisite.

JOY ROGGENKAMP

- One of the finest Australian watercolourists in the second half of the 20th century
- Highly expressive work, often tonally subtle, but vibrant in character with broad brushstrokes
- From the 1960s until her death she won many awards for her work including the Blake Prize and the Pring Prize for women watercolourists (twice)

Joy Roggenkamp cut a striking figure in the late 1940s – she possessed natural good looks and was self-assured and astute. A newspaper article at the time declared that she was ‘one of Queensland’s most promising artists’.ⁱⁱⁱ Roggenkamp also had an underlying strength, and was determined to overcome indifference and apathy such as patronising local criticism of her early on ‘as a Brisbane housewife who painted in the kitchen’.^{iv} While a more disparaging media remark made many years later forced Roggenkamp to re-evaluate her situation, she remained steadfast in her commitment to the artistic path she had chosen to follow. Of her generation in Queensland, Roggenkamp was a significant painter and arguably one of the finest watercolourists working in Australia during the second half of the twentieth century.

Roggenkamp was born in 1928 in Roma and her family moved to Brisbane prior to World War II. In 1943 Roggenkamp undertook private art classes with elderly locally trained landscape painter Percy Stanhope-Hobday. She then began study at the Central Technical College with figurative painter Melville Haysom but didn’t last long, finding the college rigid and uninspiring.

In 1945 she joined the Younger Artists’ Group of the Royal Queensland Art Society and the dynamic but peripheral Miya Studio art group. Roggenkamp began to go and hear talks about European Modernism by Gertrude Langer, an art historian who had moved to Brisbane before the Second World War. It was at this time she chose watercolour as her medium of expression.

In 1947, at 19 years of age, Roggenkamp began study at the University of Queensland in Physiotherapy, but did not find this particularly stimulating and changed to Journalism. At this time she began drawing cartoons for the University newspaper *Semper Floriet* and *The Courier Mail*.



Forest pattern (1947) gouache. QUT Art Collection

In 1947 she befriended Sidney Nolan and went to Cairns with him to do more sketching and painting. In 1949 she had a joint exhibition with her brother Ken at Moreton Galleries; her contribution was the work she produced while in Cairns with Nolan. In 1950 she had her first solo exhibition also at Moreton Galleries; the work featured was watercolours of Brisbane, Bribie and Cleveland. The work sold extremely well and received the praise of Courier Mail critic Paul Grano. The exhibition illustrated her interest in nature, with particular concentration on form and colour.

In 1955 Jon Molvig moved to Brisbane and Roggenkamp was one of a committed group of students who found inspiration in his independent, modernist

approach. In 1956 she began classes with Molvig, and was heavily influenced by his style. The influence of Molvig's raw painterly approach is felt in the watercolour *Bush fire* (1959). Here there is a sense of urgency and surety in the artist's broad, effusive brushstrokes. The composition resonates with agitate gestures of luminous colour – scorched reds and browns of fire and earth are augmented with deep green of residual foliage and the ashen blue of smoke. It is a highly expressive work, capturing the intensity of the inferno and its dramatic effect on the landscape. A conservationist well before the environmental movement gained momentum, Roggenkamp increasingly used her art to comment subtly on the plight of the natural environment, especially against wanton human destruction.

From 1958, into the 60s and really from then on, Roggenkamp began to win many awards. In 1962 she joined the Contemporary Art Society and in 1964 she had solo shows at Johnstone Gallery in Brisbane and MacQuarie Galleries in Sydney. She had begun to develop a deep appreciation for Cezanne which was reflected in this period of her work. Her pieces had a similar approach to Cezanne's, with vibrant surfaces and patterned forms.

In 1965 Roggenkamp travelled to New Guinea, particularly to Rabaul near the island of New Britain. She was very interested in the local marketplace, the people and the surrounding landscape. Upon returning home she entered and won the Pring Prize in 1967 for a work called 'To Market, To Market' which was painted during her time in New Guinea. Her time in New Guinea also prompted a change in medium and she began to use oils.

During the 1960s and 1970s the Caloundra region became important in Roggenkamp's work which featured birdlife, wildlife, flowers, children playing and seascapes. Her piece 'Untitled (Children Playing)' was compositionally challenging with a plethora of shapes and movement, it had restrained tonality but vibrant character. Her piece 'Sailing Boats, Moreton Bay' also from this series was a strong, uncompromising work with the intensity of the artists' distinctive expressionist style featuring broad wet and dry brushstrokes.

In 1966 Roggenkamp joined the Australian Watercolour Institute and entered a prolific period in her career, she exhibited each year for the next decade with several solo shows in Southern capital cities. In 1968 she travelled to Noumea an experience that again heavily influenced her work.

During the mid-1970s her work began to change slightly and featured thin, fluid washes, and watery transparent veils of colour. This created an elusive, transient, quality in her work and allowed her to capture fleeting impressions of atmosphere and light. In many works, such as 'The rainbow' (1976), shapes can be seen more as evocations rather than being openly defined.

In 1976 she exhibited at Macquarie Galleries in Canberra and a particularly hurtful comment in a newspaper review greatly affected her, causing the artist to become quite reclusive. In 1983 she moved to Maleny in the Sunshine Coast hinterland and continued to create watercolours of landscapes and coastal scenes. In 1997 Roggenkamp was awarded an Order of Australia Medal for her services to the arts. She died two years later aged 71 years, and in 2001 Caloundra Gallery did a retrospective of her work as a tribute to her life.

KATHLEEN SHILLAM

- Queensland's most important post war female sculptor
- Unwavering commitment to art over 6 decades with a remarkable and diverse body of work
- Her work was a vital link in the transition from the traditional aesthetic of 20th century sculptures to the contemporary forms of the 1960s
- Had a lasting commitment to drawing
- Many of her works are abstractions and stylisations of organic forms such as flora, fauna, animals and people
- Used natural materials such as clay, stone and wood, before moving to bronze casting later
- Often collaborated with her husband, but still retained an individual artistic practice



Seated figure (1954) limestone. QUT Art Collection

Kathleen Shillam was born in Devon in England. During World War I her family moved to Ireland and then in 1921 to Wales. Six years later they moved the family to Australia, and settled in Sandgate. In 1929 Shillam received a scholarship to attend Brisbane Girls Grammar School, and following her schooling she attended the Central Technical College from 1932 to 1934 and was taught drawing by FJ Marty Roberts. At the college she met other students Francis Lymburner, Leonard Shillam and Will Smith, and between 1935 and 1938 the four shared a studio in Victory Chambers opposite Anzac Square. Together they practiced life drawing, and carved semi-abstract human figures into clay, wood and stone.

In 1934 Shillam worked as a commercial artist, and then in 1938 she moved to Sydney to further her career. Living in North Sydney she was close to Taronga Zoo where she developed a fascination

for the animals and spent time drawing them. Because she could not afford studio space in Sydney her main focus during this time was drawing.

In 1939 Kathleen returned to Brisbane and in 1942 she married Leonard Shillam. In 1949 the couple had their first joint exhibition at Moreton Galleries, one of Kathleen's stand out works in this exhibition was titled 'The artist's model'. It was an ink drawing that was clearly influenced by British sculptor Henry Moore. Shillam had been profoundly influenced by Moore, having seen an exhibition of his works from the 1920s to the post-Second World War in Melbourne the previous year.^v However, her near-abstract *Torso* 1937, clay,^{vi} reveals that Moore's version of abstracted figuration had affected her much earlier. Shillam had encountered his work in books at Brisbane's Carnegie Corporation-sponsored art library around 1936–37. In 'The artist's model' there are echoes of the chunky solidity of Moore's 1940s drawings of family groups and standing figures. The respect which Shillam shows here for the essential quality of line to render form is also typical of the English sculptor's general approach, epitomised in works such as his famous wartime 'Shelter' drawings produced between 1940 and 1942.

From 1951 sculpture became Kathleen's more prominent work. She created simplified sandstone and wood carvings of animals, which were included in a joint exhibition she had with Leonard that also included watercolours and drawings centred on landscape. Also in 1951 she won the LJ Harvey Memorial Art Prize for drawing presented by the Queensland Art Gallery. Further, the artist had two

sandstone horse and rider sculptures included in the first Society of Sculptors exhibition at the Sydney Botanic Gardens that year. It was the first outdoor exhibition in Australia.

In 1954 Shillam showed 'Seated figure' 1954, in the Half Dozen Group of Artists annual exhibition at Finney's Art Gallery in Brisbane. Writing of her sculptural production towards the end of her life, Shillam described this and related works thus: 'These sculptures are part of the earth, they emerge from the ground like outcrops of rock, hills and mountains'.^{vii} The artist was alluding to the 'firmly based' (attached to the ground) nature of these works compared with her 'elevated forms' where shapes are poised in space such as in the seminal sandstone piece 'Horse and rider' 1950 in the Art Gallery of Western Australia.

In 1957 she created the work 'Little Horse' from glazed earthenware. It was a simple and unambiguous work featuring only the essentials, yet not abstract. During the 1950s Shillam was Queensland's most important contemporary woman sculptor. From 1958 to 1959 she taught at Stuartholme and tutored architectural students at the University of Queensland. In 1960 she had a joint exhibition with her husband at Johnstone Gallery, which allowed the Shillam's to go abroad for three years on a study trip.

From 1961 to 1964 they travelled through Greece, Italy and England. She attended the Florence Academy of Art in London and worked at the Royal College of Art. At the Royal College of Art she worked in the foundry under Bernard Meadows, a key figure of post war British Sculpture, during the 1950s he created work appropriating animal forms as vehicles for human emotion.

The three years in Europe broadened Kathleen's approach to sculpture in the technical and formal possibility of the work. In 1964 her work was selected for inclusion in the Mildura Prize for Sculpture, an inclusion that prompted her to concentrate on sculpture for a while. Her experience overseas helped her create highly unique work for an exhibition in Johnstone Gallery in 1965; it included twenty-one sculptures of animal and human figures in wood, bronze, concrete and ceramic. One piece titled 'Bull' was singled out as being particularly spectacular. Courier Mail reviewer Gertrude Langer said it was 'a monumental sculpture in classical cubist style'^{viii}.

In 1970 she was a founding member of the Society of Sculptors in Queensland, where she conducted workshops and exhibited until 1987. She established a new casting foundry in 1980 in her home studio. She was commissioned to make many works through the years, some in collaboration with Leonard and a number as a solo artist. In 1975 she taught drawing at QCA, but aside from this, a few years teaching at Stuartholme and UQ exhibition sales and commissions were her main source of income.

In 1986 Shillam was awarded an Order of Australia medal, and in 1995 the Queensland Art Gallery held a tribute exhibition of Leonard and Kathleen Shillam's work. In 2000 she was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Queensland, and in 2002 she passed away, aged 86.

ⁱ Troy Perdue. 'Betty Quelhurst', *The Gold Coast Bulletin*, 27 June, 1998.

ⁱⁱ With the demise of the Queensland Wattle League in 1946, the award was administered by Brisbane's Half Dozen Group of Artists.

ⁱⁱⁱ Unidentified newspaper source 'One-woman exhibition' from the artist's press clippings book in the possession of Ross McCowan, Maleny.

^{iv} Quoted in John Aland. 'Tribute: Joy Roggenkamp OAM, 1928–1999', *Art & Australia*, vol. 39 no. 1 2001.

^v Kathleen Shillam's interest in Henry Moore was strengthened by Leonard Shillam's admiration for the artist gained during his study in London from 1938 to 1939.

^{vi} In 1990 the work was cast in bronze.

^{vii} The artist quoted in Leonard and Kathleen Shillam. *Shillam Sculpture*, CopyRight Publishing Company Pty Ltd, Brisbane, 2000.

^{viii} Gertrude Langer. 'The Shillams show their sculptures', *Courier-Mail*, Brisbane, 11 August 1965.

BREAKING **NEW** GROUND

Brisbane Women Artists of the Mid Twentieth Century

27 July – 30 September 2007

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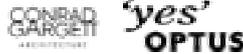
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Education Kit compiled by Cate Brown (QUT Art Museum Intern 2007) based on research from Stephen Rainbird's (Senior Curatorial Advisor, QUT Precincts) publication "Breaking New Ground: Brisbane Women Artists of the Mid Twentieth Century".

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