Introduction

In 2006 the Print Council of Australia (PCA) will celebrate its fortieth anniversary. *Marks and Motifs: Prints from the PCA Collection* has been organised to commemorate this important event. Drawn from the PCA’s nationally significant Print Archive in Melbourne, the exhibition surveys various developments in printmaking from the mid-1960s through to the present day. Works produced by established printmaking methods are juxtaposed with prints incorporating photo-media and digital technology. Contemporary issues of cultural identity, social justice, the environment, ruralism and war, and issues reflective of Australia’s socio-political consciousness are explored in the exhibition.

Key areas of interest for students

- The development of printmaking in Australia
- Printmaking techniques, including digital processes and photo-mechanical developments
- Mark making
- The differences between working in black and white or with colour
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Printmaking
- Personal style

*Bea Maddock*

*Four* 1974

Photo-etching

Sheet 52 x 76cm

Commissioned print, 1974
About the PCA Commissioning program

Contemporary printmaking in Australia has been supported and promoted by the PCA since its establishment in 1966 and each year since 1967 the PCA has commissioned artists to produce an edition of prints. In 1991, the PCA refined the commissioning process by appointing independent artists, curators and academics to select printmakers for commissioning.

Commissioned prints are distributed to subscribers of the Print Council and can be found in various Australian public art museum collections (such as QUT Art Collection), educational institutions and private collections. They are a popular and inexpensive means of acquiring premium quality contemporary works.

Two prints from each of the commissioned editions are archived annually in the Print Council’s collection. Currently comprising more than 300 prints and embracing the period from 1967 to 2005, the archive is of national significance. Rich in diversity of technique, style and subject matter, it provides a unique insight into aspects of Australian printmaking practice at a time of immense growth for the medium. Major developments during the period include the emergence of new print technologies (most notably photomechanical and digital processes); growing acceptance of collaboration as a viable working method; and the increasing relevance of the print in contemporary art.
Printmaking in Australia

Marks and Motifs attempts to chart the new-found potential of the print since the mid 1960s. The exhibition reflects a number of social and political concerns fundamental to the period but it is far from being all inclusive. Arguably, the two most significant technological developments to have impacted on Australian printmaking over the past four decades were the emergence of photo-mechanical print methods (most apparent in offset lithography and screenprint) in the mid 1960s and digital modes in the late 1980s (embodied in computer-generated imagery produced through ink-jet prints and the like). Both processes greatly altered the role of conventional printmaking by negating some of the traditional qualities which gave the print its distinctive nature, especially as a vehicle for reproduction.

This can be seen in the pioneering work of artists such as Bea Maddock and Sally Robinson, both of whom championed the use of photographic processes in etching and screenprinting respectively, relatively early in their careers. Subsequently, practitioners such as Diane Mantzaris, Lesley Duxbury and Sophia Szilagyi have exploited the creative potential of digital imaging to produce compelling prints.

Sophia Szilagyi
Where shadows lie 2005
Colour ink-jet print
Diptych, each sheet 12 x 16.5cm
Commissioned print, 2005

In 1986 Mantzaris became one of the first artists in Australia to incorporate computer print technology in her work by applying it to lithography. Duxbury was a skilled mezzotinter before turning to digital media around 1997. Her ink-jet prints explore atmosphere and mood through amorphous structures such as cloud formations, which are overlaid with descriptive text (helping to define or redefine what we see), forming a subtle interplay between environment, language and feeling.
Szilagyi is a gifted Melbourne printmaker who also produces **ink-jet prints**. Her work is based on the notion that in any domain of reality there are dualities. Through juxtapositions of archetypal imagery, she invites the viewer to consider this approach so as to explore the meaning of her work. Disputing the legitimacy of computer technology in contemporary printmaking practice nowadays seems old-fashioned. This hi-tech equipment offers enormous potential for printmaking to reinvent itself and reassert its relevance in a modern technological world.

Screenprinting and the more complex process of **photo-screenprinting** reached a peak in the 1970s. Leading exponents of the medium included Alun Leach-Jones, who brought the sharply-defined intense flat colour attributes of the form to its acme; Jan Senbergs, whose more serious and elaborate use of screenprinting is embodied in images depicting a world overrun by mechanisation; and Sally Robinson, then a leading younger-generation artist, who produced strikingly simplified images of emblematic national motifs such as the cockatoo and kangaroo. These artists were, arguably, Australia’s most dynamic practitioners working in the screenprinting medium during the 1970s.

A renewed interest in **woodcuts and linocuts** as well as lithography in the early 1980s, possibly as a reaction to the high-tech and flamboyant prints of the previous decade, marked a move towards more simple and direct methods of printmaking. This is reflected in the relief prints of artists such as Yvonne Boag, Euan Heng and Tim Jones and in the lithographs of Caroline Durré and Judy Watson, all of whom have employed traditional methods and materials to create simplified and clearly articulated works over the past two decades. Based on their responses to personal experiences and their immediate environment, the work of these artists continues to be a motivating force for a younger generation of printmakers.
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Printmaking

The making of prints by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists has emerged as one of the most significant new developments in Australian printmaking since the 1960s. Ironically, the first Indigenous prints were produced by Wiradjuri writer and political activist Kevin Gilbert and Walmatjarri artist Jimmy Pike while serving sentences in Sydney and Fremantle prisons during the mid 1960s and early 1980s respectively.

Today, printmaking is thriving in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the country, including in regions as culturally diverse as Arnhem Land, Indulkana, Lockhart River, the Kimberley Ranges, the Tiwi Islands, Murray Island and Utopia. Despite having no tradition in printmaking practices other than stencilling on rock walls, many Indigenous artists are using the medium as a natural extension of ceremonial painting and sculpture to interpret their histories. Indigenous artists such as Treahna Hamm, Judy Watson and Arone Raymond Meeks show ingenuity and freshness in works concerned with tracing their ancestral roots through cultural and spiritual references. All three are pioneers of urban contemporary Aboriginal art.
Other Themes

In addition to issues of cultural identity, the exhibition deals with a range of other concerns including social justice, the environment and new technology. These themes are reflective of Australia’s socio-political consciousness in the late twentieth century, a period circumscribed by momentous change both within the country and internationally. This transformation helped build and define our national identity and position in the world, particularly in relation to Southeast Asia, China and Japan. Divisive events such as Australia’s involvement in the Vietnam War, the dramatic sacking of the Whitlam Government in 1975 and the planned damming of the Franklin River in south-west Tasmania during the early 1980s galvanised the nation.

Reflecting this discord, many artists engaged in these debates through their work. An active print culture, especially in Melbourne and Sydney, became a dynamic conduit for venting anxiety and hostility. Ray Arnold, Barbara Hanrahan, Deborah Klein, Les Kossatz, Marie McMahon and Ann Newmarch all produced overtly polemical works covering a range of contemporary concerns such as the vulnerability of the environment, sexual equality, personal identity and the anguish of life.

In addition to being printmakers, various artists featured in this exhibition (for example John Coburn, Les Kossatz, Alun Leach-Jones and Judy Watson) also practice in other mediums such as painting and sculpture. Equally featured are specialist printmakers such as Ray Arnold, G. W. Bot and Juli Haas, for whom printmaking is their primary form of artistic expression.

Les Kossatz
Homage tank 1  1978
Colour lithograph
Sheet 76 x 57.5cm
Commissioned print, 1978
Overview of printmaking techniques

The development of printmaking as an artistic medium can be seen as connected to the development of movable type and the printing press in the 15th century (although woodblock printing had been used on textiles since ancient times). There are many different types of printmaking techniques however they usually employ one of four types of printmaking processes (this has changed with new digital printing techniques). These processes are defined as follows:

1. Intaglio
2. Screenprinting
3. Relief
4. Planographic

Intaglio
Intaglio printing processes involve the use of a metal plate. Although the individual techniques differ slightly they all involve lines or marks being cut into a metal plate and these lines/marks are the areas that hold the ink and print onto the paper. Engraving, etching, drypoint, aquatint and mezzotint are all intaglio techniques.

Can you identify works in the exhibition that have been made using intaglio techniques?

Screenprinting
The screenprinting technique is based on applying stencils to a screen which is stretched across a frame. The screen is generally made out of silk or another material of fine weave. Areas of the stencil which have been cut out allow the ink to pass through and print the image on the paper or material underneath. You may recognise the screenprinting technique best from its wide usage on textiles such as mass-produced t-shirts.

Susan Pickering
Fluent 3 1999
Etching and aquatint
Sheet 75 x 55.5cm
Commissioned print, 1999

John Coburn
Walbiri 1984
Colour screenprint
Sheet 76.5 x 56.5cm
Commissioned print, 1984
Relief Printing

Techniques where a print is achieved from raised surfaces are known as relief prints. Woodcuts, linocuts and wood engraving are all examples of relief printmaking techniques. Relief prints are created in reverse, meaning that areas to remain uninked are carved out of the wooden block or linoleum (lino). For example, if you wanted to print your name, you would need to carve it out backwards, like a mirror reflection. When the artist has finished carving the design, the block is covered with ink or paint. The final print is produced by pressing paper firmly against the block using a roller, baron or some kind of press.

Originally to create prints with many colours, several plates were required (one for each colour). However, Picasso used the linocut technique and developed his very own style. He produced multi-colour prints by cutting away more and more from one plate and printing at stages in between. At the end, the process could not be reproduced because the original plate was gone.¹

¹ http://www.artelino.com/articles/printmaking.asp

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Yvonne Boag
Untitled 1988
Woodcut
Sheet 77 x 58cm
Commissioned print, 1988

Belinda Fox
Pulse, mountain dream II 2002
Colour linocut with embossing
Sheet 76 x 57cm
Commissioned print, 2002

Compare and contrast the above two prints looking at colour, composition, mark making effects and style. In particular, consider how the artists have achieved these effects.
Planography
In planographic printing, as opposed to relief and intaglio processes, there is no difference in level between the inked surface and the non-inked surface. Lithography is a planographic printing technique which is based on the principle that water and oil resist each other. Lithography could be considered one of the most direct printmaking techniques as the image is drawn with a wax crayon straight onto a flat surface in much the same manner as a drawing.

Steps in making a Lithograph:
1. The artist draws an image on a polished slab of limestone with a greasy ink called tusche or with an oil-based lithographic crayon.
2. The stone is thoroughly dampened. The water remains on the ungreased areas only.
3. Printing ink is applied with a roller. It adheres only to the greased parts (the drawing on the stone).
4. Lightly dampened paper is then placed over the surface of the image, followed by a protective sheet. Together the stone and paper are passed through a flat-bed scraper press.

Find a lithograph within the exhibition. What are some of the obvious differences you can see between the lithograph and other print techniques?

Marks and Motifs: Prints from the PCA Collection

QUT Art Museum 22 June – 27 August 2006
2 George St Brisbane QLD 4000 (next to City Botanic Gardens)
Tues-Fri 10am – 5pm, Wed until 8pm, Sat-Sun 12-4pm | www.artmuseum.qut.edu.au

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Tour schedule
QUT Art Museum, Brisbane: 22 June – 27 August 2006
Gladstone Regional Art Gallery & Museum: 8 September – 28 October 2006
Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery: 31 January – 25 March 2007
Wagga Wagga Art Gallery: 10 April – 3 June 2007
Artspace Mackay: 28 August – 21 October 2007

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