

**printmaking  
in  
australia...**

**colonial to  
contemporary**



**queensland art gallery**

## PRINT-MAKING IN AUSTRALIA

### COLONIAL TO CONTEMPORARY

Much of what was known about early Australia was through published books which at times were richly illustrated with engravings, etchings or lithographs. It was not long after the First Fleet that English publishers were printing specialized volumes on Australia's, flora, fauna, fish and geographic peculiarities, and there was no shortage of amateur and professional artists among the civilian or military inhabitants to fulfil the artistic requirements of the publishers.

Frequently the original drawings or watercolours were "improved" or "corrected" by over enthusiastic engravers, which does account for the incorrect recording of views, botanical details or correct colours etc. Such were some of the pitfalls of early printmaking but we as a nation are very rich in this area for the Royal Society which sponsored the Cook voyages with the dynamic Joseph Banks and the French expedition to the Pacific under Nicolas Baudin all carried artists who specialized in some field (botany, zoology, landscape, portraiture) of drawing or rendering.

William Hodges on Cook's second voyage, John Webber on his last were both artists who recorded various facets of scientific observation and it was left to several unknown or doubtful artists who assisted Governor Phillip to illustrate his Journal. (1789)

Captain (later Governor) John Hunter was credited with a good hand at illustrating and many of his works were published in folios.

Artists like Thomas Watling, Thomas Berwick, V. Woodthorpe, Joseph Lycett and V.W. Huggins found their work being reproduced as etchings and lithographs or woodcuts in numerous albums and books.

Joseph Lycett at least engraved his own aquatint plates but usually his original drawings were tidied up to convey a clean fresh tame view of the Australian landscape in a rather classical manner. Augustus Earle in similar vein felt for a more romantic approach giving the landscape far more drama than order.

John Gould's Birds of Australia which began publication about 1840 proved particularly popular at a time when interest and curiosity in Australia's wild life was waning. These brilliant lithographs are still eagerly sought after today by collectors. Moreover topographical studies remained popular throughout this time.

The first commercial printmaking was probably under the auspices of the Bank of New South Wales and one of their engravers J.G. Austin produced a series of 12 views of Sydney and its environs in 1836. This was quickly followed by Conrad Martens who in 1840 commenced a large series of lithographs of Sydney views for a London firm. The first series sold very well but a later folio of of some 42 works didn't come up to the artists expectations and he lost interest in them. Whilst Martens centered his activities around Sydney, John Skinner Prout moved from that city to Hobart where he produced one of his best series of Hobart lithographs which excell in fine detail and superb composition.

While in Hobart Prout brought out a complete litho plant from England to issue this series of large lithographic views 'Tasmania Illustrated' completing this in 1846. He finally spent three months in Melbourne working on Views of Melbourne and Geelong in 1847 before returning to England.

Benjamin Duterreau also worked in Tasmania producing a few etchings and lithographs of mainly topographical interest.

The prominent gold fields artist S.T. Gill had many successful series commencing with "Heads of People" (1849) containing lithographs of well known colonists. In 1852 the first nine sets of "A Series of Sketches of the Victorian Gold Diggings as They Are appeared and the remaining eight series were issued up till the year 1868. "Scenery in and Around Sydney" 1856 and "Victoria Illustrated" 1857 (for Sands and Kenny) were a slight departure from his busy gold fields studies which were full of action, humour and at times sadness.

The American Livingston Hopkins (Hop) a brilliant newspaper cartoonist arrived in Australia about 1883 bringing his own press which became of considerable interest to Streeton, Roberts and Julian Ashton who each tried their skills in print-making. But Hopkins was perhaps the only physical influence on printmaking at the time, for artists wishing to pursue the techniques like John Shirlow had to study the works of Whistler and Meryon in galleries. Shirlow basically self-taught struggled to produce his first print in 1895 but once there his work matured dramatically and his name was a household word in Melbourne and Sydney art circles. Victor Cobb became a disciple and likewise Ernest Moffitt who became a close friend of the Lindsays during their Melbourne years, and both Moffitt and Norman Lindsay are responsible for reviving the woodcut.

Sir Lionel Lindsay must be regarded as one of the most versatile and prolific printmakers Australia has known; printing something like 50,000 individual prints in his life time. Even assuming an edition consisted of 100 prints, this means he could have produced nearly 500 plates or blocks in his career. Every process was experimented with and perfected - the superbly detailed woodblock prints in the hardest of woods, rich velvety drypoints and his meticulously crisp etchings are all part of an exciting printmaking heritage this great artist left Australia. Without doubt his influence spread widely in Australia - his brother Norman became famous for his etchings and aquatints, John Goodechild, Henry Fulwood are but a few; but the period 1910-25 produced some wonderful printmakers, Sydney Ure Smith, Sydney Long, Henri van Roalte, Jessie Traill, Napier Waller and Elioth Gruner, Cyril Dillan, Gayfield Shaw, Herbert Gallop and Margaret Preston.

With something like 90 etchings, drypoints or aquatints to his credit, Sydney Long must be regarded as one of Australia's significant printmakers.

Although much of his work was done in England where he incorporated an Art Nouveau style in this 1916-18 period, ("Pan", "Spirit of the Plains" and "Fantasy") however back in Australia around 1927 his Avoca landscapes show his best control of the etching needle.

Bad seasons often follow the good and in printmaking terms the 1930's saw a general decline in the art and in collecting which in the previous decade had done much to encourage artists. Notwithstanding, all art was suffering at the hands of a world wide depression and Australia was no exception.

Emerging from this period came Margaret Preston with her bold, almost expressionist woodcuts. Sydney Ure Smith's article, 'The Revival of the Woodcut' (Art in Australia, May 1923) paves the way for her later success as he talks of her 1923 works "Cockatoos", "Emus" and "Kookaburras". "Like her painting, it expresses her vitality and rebellion. Its conscious crudity makes it a succession of bold statements. Nothing is feeble or faded. It has personality, animation, vigour."

Her prints were hand coloured which makes them even by today's standards a highly regarded body of work.

With the emerging light of Margaret Preston came a handful of moderns who rightfully join the ranks of prominent printmakers. Eric Thake with the most precise yet expressive line executed in lino - his control is uncanny. Murray Griffin who's multi coloured lino cuts of birds, must surely rank him more highly than most artists. (His 1974 series of birds although equally as complex in design and colour lose a little in spontaneity). Noel Counihan again searching for social problems that his brush interpreted so well turned to the stark black and white of linocuts frequently gouging out expressionistic forms with great intensity. Frank Hinder's well controlled semi-abstract compositions responded so easily to the lithographic medium in such a way as to create a multitude of feelings and movements. We even hear the chirping of his small birds. His means of communicating many things in many ways is unique in Australian lithography. Rah Fizelle although never fully involved in print making turned a more than capable hand towards woodcuts and had the desire for print making been greater, far more significant results would have been achieved. Finally of this period Lesbia Thorpe holds her own and continues to do so against a male dominated cast but then the variety and excellence of her prints speak for themselves.

If we are to look for more purposeful revivals in printmaking then we must look to Adelaide in the middle forties and Melbourne a little latter. Jacqueline Hick and Jeffrey Smart while at the S.A. School of Art were influenced by the work of John Goodchild who was then Principal of the School. But unfortunately a lack of suitable materials and presses limited the full development of these artists.

Alan Summer with his serigraphs in 1946 and Len Annois with his sensitive lithographs started to raise the hopes of Melbourne print makers. But before long they were to be joined by a steady flow of migrant artists who were well versed in multiple techniques - many acquired in the finest art schools in Europe.

Udo Sellback, Karen Schepers, Tate Adams, Vaclavas Ratas, Eileen Mayo, Henry Salkauskas, Herta Kluge-Pott, Eve Keky and Alun Leach Jones each have contributed a great deal through their own creative processes or more importantly passed on to numerous students their skills and experience.

But the great influx of newcomers into the Australian art scene could barely keep up with the great exodus of local artists who were anxious to be part of a wider, more exciting and adventurous scene in London, Paris or New York. Many experimented with prints - notably Earl Backen who joined Stanley William Hayter's Atelier 17 in Paris. Backen later returned to lead a very strong printmaking course at East Sydney Technical College. Nolan and Olsen also worked with Hayter but then so did many other printmakers who in turn taught Australians abroad. Major London art schools like the Central School of Arts and Crafts saw Grahame King, Geoffrey Brown and Fred Williams on its class lists, while the Slade School of Art was responsible for John Courier, Janet Dawson, Brian Seidel, David Gillison and Murray Walker being introduced to its fine workshop and staff.

There have been several efforts to recreate the Atelier 17 Print Workshop in Australia but these have never really succeeded - some occurring too early to be widely and fully appreciated, others being badly organized or ill equipped. But it was in the Art Schools themselves where the greatest developments were to be seen. Institute of Technology (R.M.I.T. in Melbourne), East Sydney Technical College, South Australian Schools of Art were notable institutions but now many State Colleges and Colleges of Advanced Education have excellent facilities for the art student to develop his interest and appreciation in all aspects of printmaking - in fact the picture has never been a happier one.

Melbourne may well be hailed as the centre of printmaking and teaching - having in its earlier days (ie. the '50's), Leonard French teaching at the Melbourne School of Graphic Arts, Tate Adams at the R.M.I.T., Kenneth Jack at Caulfield Technical College and a thriving Graphics Department at Swinbourne Technical College.

The fact that the now well established Print Council of Australia was formed in Melbourne in 1966 is also significant; its aim being to encourage print-making in Australia. Many contemporary prints in the Queensland Art Gallery's Collection have been collected from the annual Patron and Member prints the Print Council have offered.

The task of listing present day printmakers in Australia would be almost impossible as the list extends to many hundreds. With each year the number of graduating art students who have majored in printmaking and who continue to practice their art adds to a healthy total and augurs well for the future of printmaking. Exciting new developments in the art have led more and more students to make a study of this absorbing and intriguing art and their work breathes a vitality and originality that seems somewhat lacking in easel painting today. A more enlightened and appreciative art public now accepts the original print far more readily than say twenty years ago, and while we still have established artists like George Baldessin, Arthur Boyd, Fred Williams, Charles Blackman, Brett Whiteley, Noel Counihan, John Coburn and many others using prints expressively and creatively then the acceptance of printmaking and its future will be assured for the more avant garde printmakers like Stephen Spurrier, Rod Albury, James Taylor, Chris Croft, Philip Heaton, Katrina Lievense, Mark Momont, Bettina McMahon, Michael West and Joy Hutton who may feel success is only round the corner.

## PRINTMAKING PROCESSES IN BRIEF

### The Woodcut

As the Japanese woodcuts were made on a plank of timber using the length of the close grain, this method of relief printing is the same as in lino cuts. The lines are left in relief with negative areas cut away - the line when inked and printed will show black the cut away areas reveal the white paper. The woodcuts of Durer, the Japanese woodcuts and the woodcuts of the 20th century German Expressionists are done in this manner.

### Wood Engraving

The dense end grain of box-wood is used here when fine lines are cut into the wood with fine line engraving tools. Because of the size of boxwood pieces, several small blocks had to be wedged together to form larger blocks which after numerous printings tended to open slightly to reveal hair line marks on the print. Fine lines only could be pecked out of the hard wood necessitating a fine white line on dark background print. Sir Lionel Lindsay, Thomas Bewick, Timothy Cole and Robert Gribbings are without peer in this process.

### Line Engraving

Takes place usually on steel, copper or zinc plate. Lines to be printed are cut into the surface by means of a burin (a small metal tool whose handle rests in the hollow of the hand). Considerable control is needed to direct the precise, sharp, swelling or tapering lines when working, and many textural effects - dotting and hatching are common. Durer did many engravings as did Van Dyke, and many of the old masters.

### Etching

Copper or zinc plate 1/32" thick can be used, cut to exact size of the design, the edges are bevelled and the highly polished surface is coated with an acid-resisting wax. The drawing is made with a sharp metal needle cutting the wax and exposing the metal. The plate is immersed in an acid bath - the acid biting or etching into the exposed metal. Diluted nitric acid is the usual mordant but other acids may be used.

Because all lines are of equal thickness, the artist removes the plate from the acid - and with an acid resisting varnish seals the lines he considers deep enough. The plate is placed in the acid to deepen the lines of those exposed to the acid.

The finished plate is a shiny metal surface with bitten lines of varying depths. Ink is forced into these lines and the surplus wiped from the plate's surface. A roller press is used for printing.

### Drypoint

Is not technically an etching as the plate is engraved or drawn directly as in line engraving. The engraved line is a precise V shape cut; the drypoint leaves a sharp scratch with a burr on one side. The scratch and burr receive and transfer the ink to the paper, but the heavy pressure necessary for the printing gradually flattens the delicate burr and limits the number of prints obtainable from the plate. Drypoint is identified by its crisp lines, velvety edges and spontaneous drawing.

### Soft Ground Etching

Has the appearance of a chalk drawing. The copper or zinc plate is coated with a wax ground which also contains tallow. Paper is placed over this ground and the drawing made with a pencil - the pressure causing the soft ground to adhere to the paper. The plate is then immersed in acid which etches the exposed metal.

### Aquatint

Aquatint is etching in mass instead of in line. Rosin dust deposited in the plate is "fixed with heat" - making a protective screen - but permitting part of the plate to be bitten by the acid. As with line etching the artist periodically seals those parts he considers deep enough to contain the quantity of ink necessary to produce the correct tone. Line etching is frequently incorporated with aquatint.

### Mezzotint

Roulettes and rockers are small hand tools which rotate and leave a series of close dots on the copper plate's surface. This 17th century process allowed for the whole surface to be first roughened with these roulettes producing an even tone in ink if printed. However white and tone areas are obtained by scraping away the roughened surface where necessary. In other words the image is made by scraping and burnishing the roughened plate to produce tones and highlights.

### Lithograph

The simple fact that grease and water do not mix is the principle of lithography. A greasy wax crayon or lithographic ink is used to draw the original onto a zinc plate, or as formerly, on a finely grained grey lithographic stone.



The plate is dampened with water and an inked roller is run over the plate, the damp areas repel the ink but the greasy wax crayon parts will take printer's ink from the roller. These inked parts are transferred to paper under the pressure of the printing press.

### Silk Screen (Serigraph) and Stencil Printing

Silk screen is basically a stencil process. A wooden frame from 2" x 2" timber is covered with a stretched piece of silk, forming a shallow tray with edges sealed with brown sticky tape. Various materials can be used to mask off portions of the silk screen - lacquer, glue, paper, stencilese or photographic emulsion. Semiliquid paint is poured into the tray and with printing paper underneath a rubber squeegee draws the paint across the bottom of the tray or screen. The colour passes through the fine silk mesh of the non-masked areas and is deposited on the paper. By using various screens and different colours and registration marks, multi-coloured prints are obtainable.

Paper cut outs can be a more simplified process - being placed between the printing paper and the under side of the screen the same method of printing can be employed - the first application of the sticky paint adheres the cut outs to the screen.

ADAMS, Tate

1. "Clown", lithograph, 76.2 x 50.8 cm

ANNOIS, Len

2. "A View of Florence". lithograph, 38 x 54.2 cm

ARMYTAGE, J.C.

3. "Brisbane" (from South Brisbane), engraving, (J.C. Armytage)  
12.4 x 18.3 cm

BACKEN, Earl

4. "Etching in Two Colours, 1962". etching, 33.3 x 50 cm

BLACKMAN, Charles

5. "Night Flight". lithograph, 55 x 76 cm

BALDESSIN, George

6. "Night Personages", etching, 50 x 42.5 cm

BRACK, John

7. "Acrobatic Skaters". lithograph, 37.5 x 24 cm

BRASH, Barbara

8. "Surfaces III", coloured intaglio, 36.2 x 24 cm

BROWN, Vincent

9. "Toilet", lithograph, 35.5 x 43.2 cm

BOYD, Arthur

10. "Hammock Lovers", Lithograph, 43.2 x 48.3 cm
11. "Romeo and Juliet", lithograph, 43.5 x 52.7 cm

CARR, J.

12. "Townsville, Queensland", engraving, (S. Bradshaw), 12 x 19 cm
13. "Gladstone, Queensland", engraving, (J.J. Crew), 12.3 x 18.5 cm
14. "New Zealand Gully near Rockhampton", engraving, (T. Heawood)  
12.3 x 18.5 cm

COBURN, John

15. "Fiesta", screenprint". 53.8 x 65.9 cm

CONDER, Charles

16. "Ester", lithograph, 24.2 x 31.3 cm
17. "Chez Camile Maupin", lithograph, 21.4 x 28.5 cm

COUNIHAN, Noel

18. "An Old Man" 1959, lino cut, 50.5 x 24.5 cm  
19. "Mexican Girl", lino cut, 56 x 38 cm

CROOKE, Ray

20. "The Creation", etching, 19.8 x 24 cm

DRYSDALE, Russell (Sir)

21. "Old Dan". lithograph, 70 x 48 cm

DUTTEREAU, Benjamin

22. "A Wild Native taking a Kangaroo", etching, 16.7 x 25 cm

DYSON, Will

23. "Awaiting Relief, Ville sur Ancre, 1918", lithograph, 56 x 46 cm

FIZELLE, Rah

24. "Italian Village", woodcut, 10.3 x 15.1 cm

FLUGELMAN, Herbert

25. Untitled, screenprint, 51.4 x 71.1 cm

GRIFFIN, Murray

26. "The Gull", coloured lino cut, 28 x 35.6 cm  
27. "Burning Mountain", coloured lino cut, 35.2 x 46 cm

GILL, S.T.

28. "The New Rush," coloured lithograph, 17.7 x 25.4 cm

GRIEVE, Robert

29. "The Warrior", lithograph, 46.4 x 29.5 cm

GRUNER, Elioth

30. "The Wattles", etching / aquatint, 20 x 23.5 cm

HILDER, J.J.

31. "Dora Creek", aquatint, (16.7 x 22.9 cm (Printed by Sir Lionel Lindsay)

HINDER, Frank

32. "Advance", lithograph, 39 x 27.1 cm  
33. "Bird and Snake", lithograph, 23.5 x 32.4 cm

HUTTON, Joy

34. "Garden", silkscreen, 55 x 41 cm

KEMP, Roger

35. "Sequence 12" etching, 53.3 x 70.4 cm

KEMPF, Franz

36. "Icon I", lithograph, 49.7 x 35.9 cm

LANCELEY, Colin

37. "Morning and Melancholia", screenprint, 71 x 91.5 cm

LASSALLE, Emile

38. "English Settlement at Port Essington", coloured lithograph,  
26 x 38.8 cm

LINDSAY, Sir Lionel

39. "Cobb and Co.", drypoint/etching, 21.6 x 30.5 cm

40. "Convent of St. Euphemia", drypoint, 25.4 x 34.6 cm

41. "Morning Glory", wood engraving, 25 x 14.4 cm

LINDSAY, Norman

42. "The Innocents", etching, 35 x 30.5 cm

43. "The Priestess of the Magi", etching, 25 x 28.1 cm

44. "Casanova", etching, 35 x 25.2 cm

45. "The Three Dresses", etching, 28.9 x 23.2 cm

LONG, Sydney

46. "Pan", etching and aquatint, 28 x 41.6 cm

47. Untitled Study of Trees, etching, 25.1 x 28 cm

McQUEEN, Mary

48. "Bird", lithograph, 55.3 x 44.2 cm

NOLAN, Sidney

49. "Kelly III", lithograph, 61.2 x 49.2 cm

PALMER, Ethleen

50. "Egrets", 1937, coloured lino cut, 26.2 x 27.6 cm

51. "Making the Road", lino cut, 27 x 33.6 cm

PARKINSON, Sydney

52. "Endeavour Ashore at Cooktown", hand coloured engraving,  
(W. Byrne) 22 x 49.3 cm

PRESTON, Margaret

53. "Flowersellers Stall", coloured woodcut, 20.3 x 26.3 cm  
54. "Waratah Group", coloured woodcut, 24.7 x 24.7 cm

PRESTON, Walter

55. "Sydney from Bennelong's Point", hand coloured engraving,  
31.7 x 46.3 cm

PRATT, Douglas

56. "Victims of the Southerlies", etching, 18.4 x 26.3 cm

RIGBY, John

57. "Mother and Child", woodcut, 61.8 x 45.7 cm

REINHARD, Ken

58. "Boxed Grader", screenprint, 81 x 55 cm

ROSE, David

59. "Black Vertical", lithograph, 58 x 38.8 cm

SHIRLOW, John

60. "The Saw Mill", etching, 18.5 x 12.5 cm

THAKE, Eric

61. "The Plume Hunter", linocut, 20 x 14.5 cm

TRAIL, Jessie

62. "Old Mill, Coliban Vale, Vic.", etching, 19 x 23 cm  
63. "Beautiful Victims", etching, 65.4 x 49.2 cm  
64. "Building Sydney Harbour Bridge IV", etching, 40.3 x 25 cm

TULLOCK, D.

65. "Great Meeting of Gold Diggers" coloured engraving, 20 x 29 cm

VON GUERARD, Eugene

66. "Junction of Buchan and Snowy Rivers, Gippsland", coloured  
lithograph, 33 x 50 cm

WALLER, M. Napier

67. "Gentleman in Black", coloured linocut 30.6 x 17.7 cm

WHITELEY, Brett

68. "Figure on Ochre Background". lithograph, 68.9 x 52.4 cm

WILLIAMS, Fred

69. "Landscape Triptych", etching and aquatint, 12.7 x 28 cm