

International Printer-Artist Exchange



From left:
Dorothy Napangardi
with Belinda Fox

Belinda Fox currently needs little introduction among printmakers in Australia. Although well known for her work at Port Jackson Press, her reputation as an independent artist is also in the ascent, having gained official recognition recently as the Grand Prize winner at the prestigious 2004 Silk Cut Linocut Print Award.

The Australian/USA artist-printer cultural exchange grew out of Belinda's participation in a five-day workshop with Crown Point Press in 2003 and subsequent discussions with its director Kathan Brown. Although Belinda attended the workshop as an artist, later selling a print made there to the National Gallery of Australia, her dual objective at the time was to study American print studio designs to assist in the redevelopment of Port Jackson Press Australia. She also visited workshops in New York, including Pace, Two Palms Press and ULAE.

One of the attractions of Crown Point Press is its 39-year track record as a major print publishing house for American artists. Although originally established as a print workshop in 1962, Crown Point Press began publishing etching portfolios by Richard Diebenkorn and Wayne Thiebaud three years later. Through an alliance with New York publisher, Parasol Press, in 1971 the Press went on to produce prints for Sol LeWitt, Brice Marsden, and other key minimalist artists. From 1977, Crown Point Press shifted focus to publishing the work of conceptual artists such as Vito Acconci, Chris Burden, Tom Marioni, John Cage and Pat Steir. While its printers specialise in etching, a series of programs initiated in the early 1980s have also supported American artists to work in Japan and China with printers using traditional woodcut techniques.

The Press has relocated twice, initially from Oakland to Berkeley, and finally to its current location in Hawthorne Street, San Francisco, where facilities include a gallery,

In August 2004 Dena Schuckit, master printer at the San Francisco publishing house Crown Point Press, gave a talk in Melbourne at Port Jackson Press Australia's Smith Street Print Room. Dena was in Australia as part of a publishing project and cultural exchange initiated by PJPA's own workshop manager Belinda Fox in 2003. After leaving Melbourne, Dena and Belinda travelled to Darwin, Oenpelli, Bathurst and Melville islands, and Sydney, where they worked with indigenous artist Dorothy Napangardi on the plates for a series of 9 colour aquatints. In late October Belinda returned to the USA to assist Crown Point Press with the editioning of these prints. Dorothy also travelled to the USA to the launch of her prints in November.

As well as attending Dena's talk, I interviewed Belinda before she left to find out more about the exchange.

two large etching studios and a staff of ten. Would-be printers serve a three-month trial before being accepted into a three-year apprenticeship.

Each year Crown Point Press publishes etchings for up to eight invited artists who spend 2-3 weeks working at the Press. Their editions average 30-40 prints, although occasionally they may consist of as few as 10. Crown Point Press retains all the prints, paying artists a standard commission from sales.

Conversely summer workshops in etching and photogravure are open to all artists in maximum groups of ten. Sometimes they are also attended by curious collectors who want to understand print processes.

Dena Schuckit's talk about her work at Crown Point Press and subsequent discussions demonstrated to an Australian audience that there are some trans Pacific differences in work arrangements for printers in America and Australia, and in perceptions of their role. If seminar



right Dena Schuckit watches Dorothy Napangardi working on a plate, Sydney, 2004

sessions at the Fifth Print Symposium in Canberra this year clearly favoured a model that celebrated creative collaboration between printer and artist, in the USA printers are more likely to be celebrated for their technical support of artists. Due to the larger scale of the market in the USA, there are more opportunities for skilled printers to find work with publishing houses. In practise greater demand can also mean that master printers may work more days in paid employment than their Australian counterparts and have less time to work as independent artists.

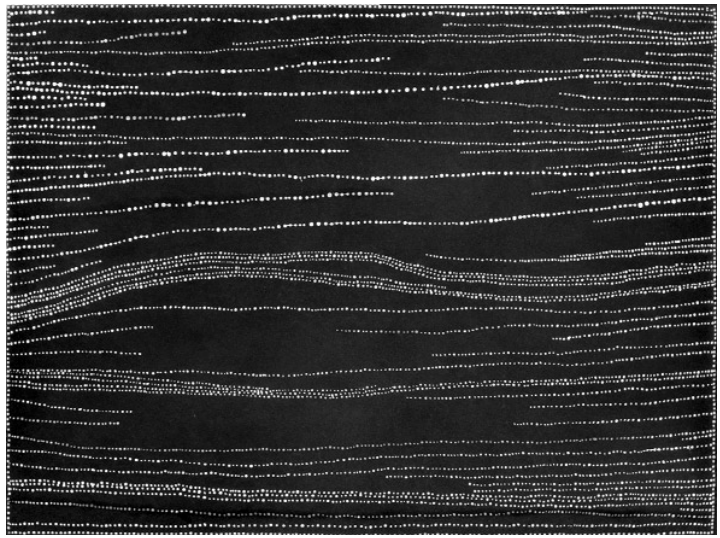
In Belinda's experience Crown Point Press ran like 'a well oiled machine', enabling her to share ideas and learn precision techniques such as hand wiping, which she now applies to aquatints in Australia.

Belinda's own exchange proposal built on Crown Point Press' prior experience of organising artists to work in Asia and her own enthusiasm for collaborative learning. Funded by Crown Point Press, Dena and Belinda's trip to the Northern Territory and Tiwi islands was designed to provide Dena with a cultural introduction to indigenous Australia. Their arrival in Darwin was timed to coincide with the opening of the 2004 Telstra Indigenous Art Awards. They were joined by Lotte Waters, Sydney Exhibition and Events Coordinator for Gallery Gondwana, which represents Dorothy Napangardi in Alice Springs and Sydney.

In Sydney Dena and Belinda worked with Dorothy in the studios of the National Art School. Their intention was to provide the artist with a stress-free environment for introducing new print techniques, which was largely possible due to the supportive staff at the NAS. Dorothy was a perfect candidate as the project's Australian exchange artist. She had all the right qualities to offset Crown Point Press' potential commercial risk in publishing a suite of prints by an overseas artist: a growing reputation among collectors as an exceptional artist, a capacity for hard work and a high degree of dependability due to her supportive base through the Gallery Gondwana team.

Considered to be Gallery Gondwana's 'most experimental artist', Dorothy Napangardi is a Walpiri woman from Mina Mina, a significant women's site in a remote area of the Northern Territory located near Lake Mackay in the Tanami Desert, north of Yuendumu. Her works depict this ceremonial site of origin for Walpiri women's *Jukurrpa* (dreaming). Moving away from traditional iconography, her visual language is formed by intricate networks of dotted lines that cross and collide, expand and contract to create a strong but delicately manipulated surface tension. Her site-related perspective shifts constantly between the macroscopic and the microscopic.

Although she has been painting since 1987 and has won several major prizes, Dorothy's reputation was consolidated when she won the 18th National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Art Award in 2001. She is represented in many significant collections, including the National Gallery of Australia, state galleries of Queensland, South Australia and Victoria, the Australia Council, and major



Dorothy Napangardi SANDHILLS, 2004

Colour soap ground and spit bite aquatints. Paper: Somerset satin white, edition 50
paper size: 25 x 30 inches (63.5 x 76.2cm)
image size: 17 x 23 inches (43.2 x 58.5 cm)

© Dorothy Napangardi

institutional collections in the USA, Germany and the Netherlands.

At the National Art School, Dorothy worked on plates prepared by the two printers using a variety of techniques including soap ground. This type of ground disintegrates slowly in acid, providing a subtle trace of the artist's mark. As Dorothy made her images, Dena and Belinda processed and proofed the plates and tested colour variations. Small experimental proofs were also made using spit bite, soap ground and sugar lift and aquatint techniques. The end result was a stunning suite of 9 colour aquatints that possess all the characteristics of Dorothy's major paintings.

The prints will be published as editions of 50 by Crown Point Press in cooperation with Gallery Gondwana. For the American publishing house this marks a significant departure from its usual practice of publishing work by American artists. Crown Point Press will launch the prints in the USA in mid November. In Australia they will be on display at Port Jackson Press Gallery, 716 High Street, Armadale, and at Gallery Gondwana (Sydney and Alice Springs) from 8 December 2004 – 30 January 2005.

Now attuned to the long term planning required for this type of project and the difficulties of marketing art works overseas, Belinda still hopes to establish a future cultural exchange project to bring an American artist to work in Australia. She also remains optimistic about Australian talent in print media: 'I felt really proud of Australian printmaking when I came back. Americans were doing this really amazing stuff but so were we and it has been great to bring the best of both worlds together.'

For more information visit these websites:

- Crown Point Press www.crownpoint.com
- Port Jackson Press www.portjacksonpress.com.au
- Gallery Gondwana www.gallerygondwana.com.au

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