

# Belinda Fox

Backwards-Forwards

Fremantle Arts Centre  
December 8 2007 - January 27 2008



# Forword and Acknowledgements

In 2005 I received funding from the Australian Council for the Arts and The Ian Potter Cultural Trust to undertake an invited residence at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute (STPI) and also to travel to Tibet for research in 2006. During the residency at the STPI I made my first impressions of my travels to Tibet and it also provided me opportunities to learn new techniques and work along side their master printers. From this amazing experience I found myself seeing the potential for my work to be larger and more experimental than I had previously been making. On my return I wrote a proposal to the Fremantle Arts Centre to extend my ideas from the STPI residence into a full room installation. To my delight they not only offered me a space to exhibit but also a month-long residency. Backwards-Forwards is the result of this residency and the following publication documents the two projects over the past two years.

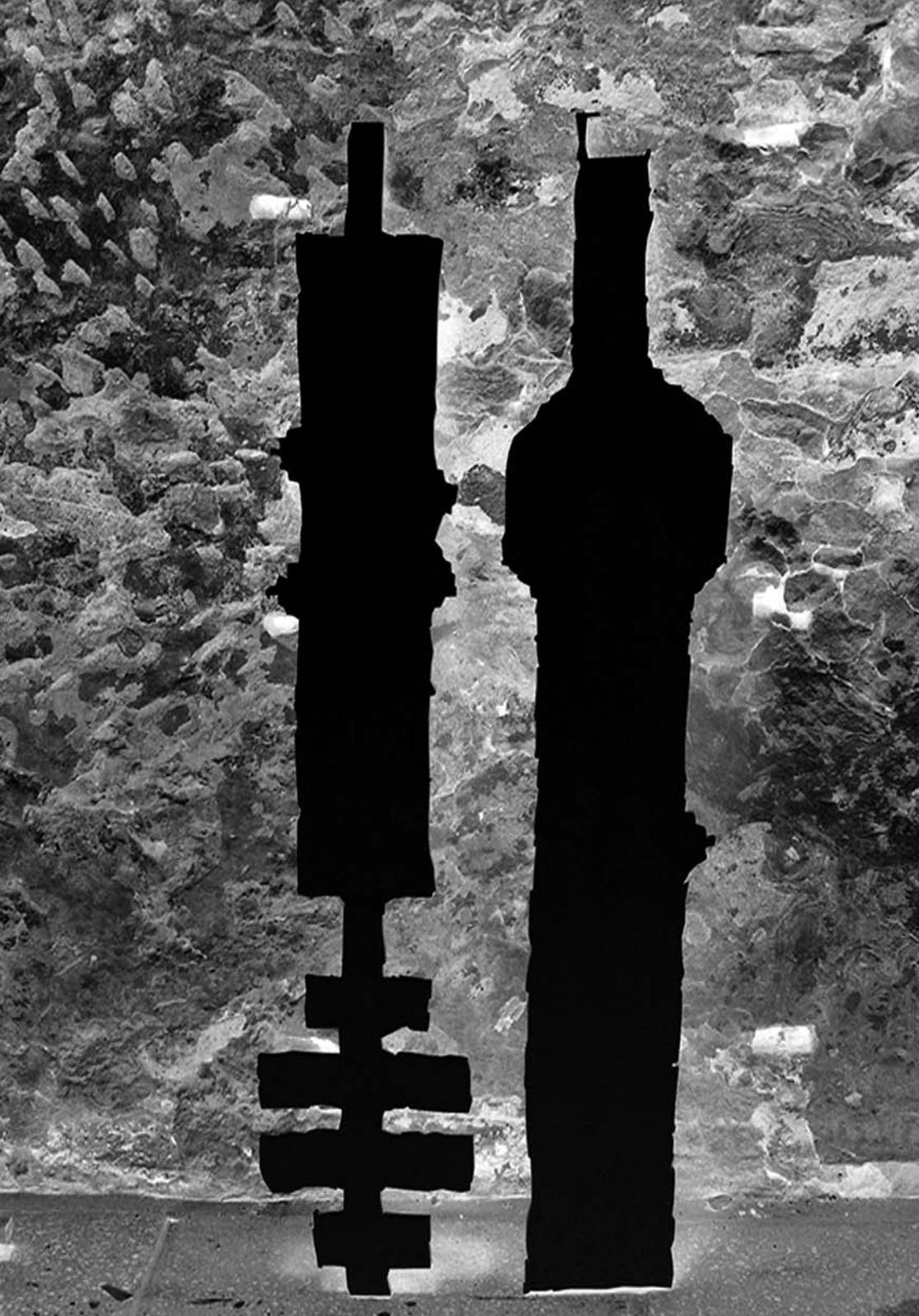
These two residencies would never have happened without the generous support of the Fremantle Arts Centre and The Singapore Tyler Print Institute. I thank them with all my heart for giving me such a wonderful opportunity to grow as an artist.

I would like to sincerely thank  
Jasmin Stephens, Irene Lee, Bevan Honey and Consuelo Cavaniglia for making these residencies possible.

Many thanks to the following people who helped with the production of  
Backwards-Forwards;  
Mum and Dad, Alyssa Evans, George Warburton, Rachel Kierath, Rachel Salmon-Lomas, George Gregson, Erin Coates  
Thea Costantino, James Hensby, Jens Donlin and especially Holly Story.

And finally thank you to all my friends, parents and my dear Brad for their continuous support.

Backwards-Forwards is dedicated to those caught in the crossfire of conflict, past and present.



**Belinda Fox in correspondence with Jasmin Stephens  
Curator/Exhibitions Manager, Fremantle Arts Centre:**

**By way of background, what did you know of Fremantle Arts Centre before taking up the residency?**

Well for many years I have been entering the Fremantle Print Award and I was also invited to speak at the Centre's conference on printmaking in 2005 so I guess that is where I really got a feel for the place.

**How did the residency come about?**

After I returned from Singapore in 2006, I was originally scheduled to exhibit at the Mildura Arts Centre. As it turned out, the curator I had been dealing with left and it became a bit difficult, so I started thinking about other public spaces that would allow me to elaborate on the studies and ideas conceived in Singapore. Bevan Honey (artist and staff member at FAC) and I were discussing my proposal and he suggested I submit an application. Initially it was just to have an exhibition; the residency component evolved after my proposal was taken up by the gallery.

**As a recipient of several residencies, what are you learning about them and how best to undertake them?**

Every residency is unique, with its own quirks and systems, so it is hard to pin down what works and what doesn't. The greatest skill you can have in this situation is the ability to adapt quickly. As an artist-in-residence in a foreign place, you need to be self-reliant but also have to rely on so many others to help you organise your time and materials. I find that a strange paradox.

The most difficult aspect for me is being away from my home base - my loved ones and their support. Partners can accompany artists, depending upon space and conditions of the residency, but coordinating the two schedules is always challenging. Having said that, I do find that being on my own gives me a focus and a clarity that I otherwise might not have. For both Singapore and Fremantle, I had clear starting points for my time there. Of course what you propose and what you end up making can change dramatically, but having a firm idea initially is definitely the best option if you have time constraints.

**How has the sequential process of residence immediately followed by exhibition at Fremantle Art Centre shaped your expectations and approach to the residency?**

Well I knew I had to be super organised to accomplish both! It probably made doing the residency more stressful because of the tight deadline. The first two weeks were much more relaxing and allowed me time to get out and see a bit of Fremantle but the last two weeks have been absolutely crazy and I feel I have been in the studio 24/7. On the other hand, I have been amazed at what I have managed to achieve because I am so focused. At home I tend to have a few projects on the go at once but here I have been putting this show together in complete isolation. And I think the work has really benefited. Have I benefited—well, that is debatable!

**How has the character of your forthcoming exhibition which is a solo exhibition in a publicly funded gallery shaped your objectives?**

Exhibiting in a publicly funded gallery has had a huge impact on this current work, and was a key reason I applied for this space. I wanted to really push myself creatively and conceptually without any constraints. Having an entire room to make site-specific artwork is a new and very exciting opportunity for me. I really wanted to make a piece for the viewer to immerse themselves in - a space to move through not just two-dimensional work viewed on the walls. It was also important for me not to worry about selling the work - I just wanted to explore an idea and be experimental. These were my main objectives and I think I have succeeded in this. I also wanted to use

the flocking technique in a subtle way but on a large scale. I feel I have achieved this as well. The velvety black of the flocking is very seductive but hard to rein in! It has taken these two residencies and now the show to find a way.

**Your exhibition, Backwards-Forwards, has been portrayed by you as giving voice to your anti-war convictions and your opposition to Australia's deployment of fighting troops in Iraq. It is always challenging for an artist to express political views through their work. Could you describe why you have embarked upon this project here and now?**

Yes, it is hard to make political work without being judgemental. I wouldn't call Backwards-Forwards a protest but maybe a reflection on war in general, with Iraq as our present day situation. I wanted to make this work more overt than my drawings and paintings because I had this opportunity to create a space that the viewer can enter and engage in a more physical way.

My work in general explores the tenuous notion of balance during times of discontent. This work is posing more difficult questions regarding our current political climate and the futility of war and its effect on everyday people. When I read that 77,000 Iraqi civilians (and still counting) have died in Iraq to date I felt compelled to comment on it in some way because it is something I feel very strongly about.

I used the traditional Japanese screen to talk about what screens do – they cover up, block out, distract one's gaze and decorate a room. The screen represents the domestic malaise that has been distracting Australians living in their comfortable homes for the past ten years while Australian and foreign troops enter Iraq under false pretences. I wanted to see if the viewer is seduced by the glossy front of the screen and remain there or if they will move around to see what is on the back and walls beyond. If the person engages with the whole room they will get to feel and see and read about past and present tragedies and triumphs of human spirit. The lotus, a symbol of hope, is ever present to symbolise harmony, but behind it is a harsh reminder that human nature can be both incredibly beautiful and cruel in the same breath.

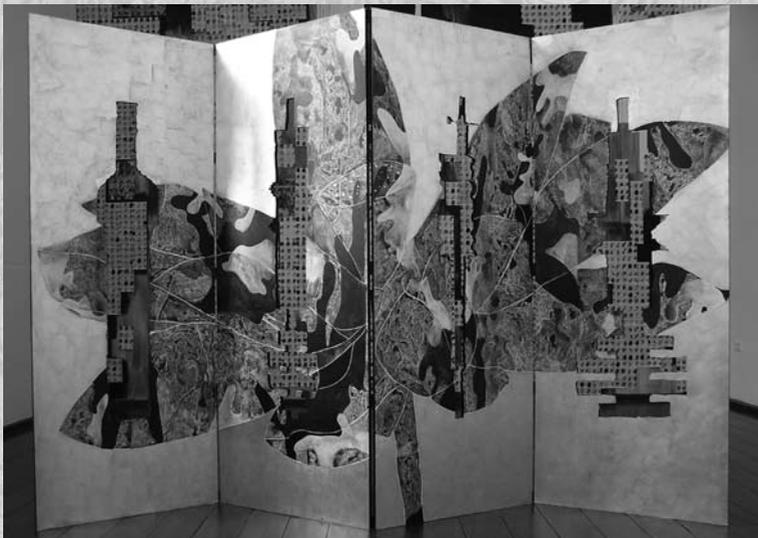
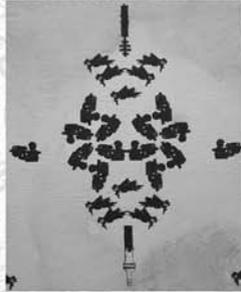
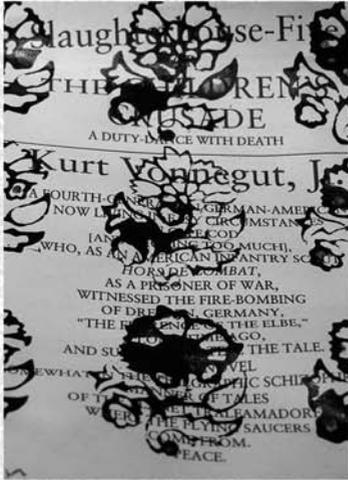
**Casual viewers and astute collectors alike are drawn to the beauty of your work. Without having installed the show, could you comment on the possibility that the beauty of the work you have been making will undermine the political intention of your exhibition?**

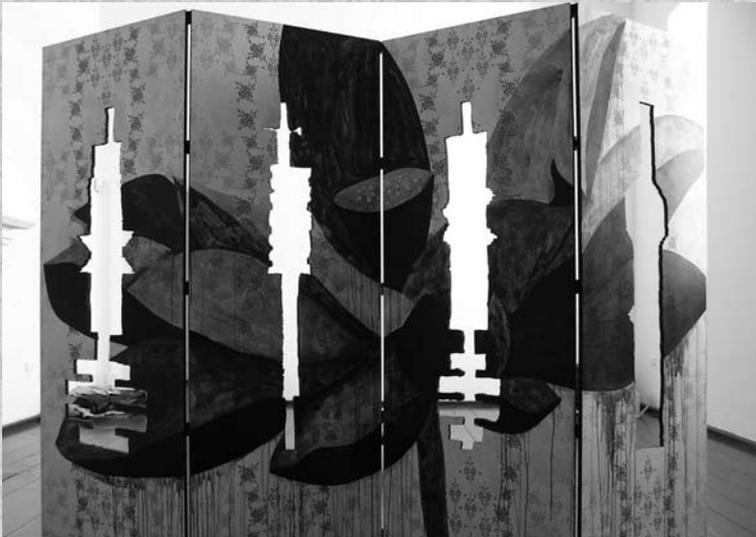
Well I suppose viewers will have to form their own opinions about this. I would love for the work to permeate their hearts and make them reflect and think about the message, but on a more subtle level. This will not occur if the work is so unattractive or violent it repels them or so prescriptive it annoys them. I believe there needs to be beauty to see the ugly. The idea of this show is to engage and reflect, using the beauty of the flocking, gold leaf and surfaces to draw the viewer in so that they may then realise that the screen actually has holes in it and they are bombs, and that the pages from the books are all war tales or references, and inside the books, there are lists of who and how a person died in Iraq last month. Felix Gonzales-Torres, the American artist wrote, 'Beauty is a power we should reinvest with our own purpose.' I think that sums up my aims perfectly.

**So where to from here?**

A long break! There have been many new ideas that have developed here in Fremantle so I have no doubt aspects of these will be further explored in 2008. In terms of solo shows I have one in Melbourne for the Art Fair and also a show at Turner Galleries in Perth in 2008. For projects I have been invited to do a residency at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop. I am currently seeking funding to work there for six weeks with their master craftspeople to develop a series of study tapestries with the final goal to develop one of them into a full scale rug that will be shown as part of another room installation (for a public gallery). It is a very exciting project and that should all happen in 2008 and 2009.

# Fremantle Residency





# Belinda Fox at the Singapore Tyler Print Institute

*Belinda Fox and writer Katherine McDonald exchanged emails during the first two weeks of the artist's four-week residency at the STPI in July 2006.*

## **How did your residency at the STPI come about?**

The Director of the STPI, Irene Lee, and I met in Australia whilst Brent Harris was working at the STPI. Through mutual interest, we organised an artist/printer residency. I was invited for a month-long stay and I set about applying for funding for travel expenses. I had also wanted to visit Tibet for art-based research and thought of bringing the two together, so I applied to travel first to Tibet, and then on to the STPI to make my first impressions of Tibet. The last two weeks would be for further development as a printer, working alongside their master printers. Luckily I got an Australia Council grant and an Ian Potter Foundation grant that helped pay for expenses. The STPI supplied an apartment for the month, and an artist studio for two weeks to make my own artwork. In return, I would work as a printer for the remaining two weeks.

## **Can you describe the extraordinary print facilities at the STPI?**

Where to begin! The STPI set up is based on the American model where BIG is better! The options for large-scale projects are vast, and the addition of a papermaking studio has allowed artists a unique opportunity to make paper pulp images. Lithography, etching, woodblock, photo etching, screenprinting, and papermaking are available to the invited artists they publish. There is also an artist studio and accommodation, so the artist is completely catered for, and an amazing gallery space in which to exhibit.

## **Did you arrive with a preconceived idea for the work? How has your recent travel to Tibet influenced your thinking?**

I had a starting point before I left Australia, knowing the blank canvas is very intimidating, but it was an open starting point. None of which I ended up using! After my travels in Tibet I wanted to draw on my impressions of my journey and my feelings about the cultural conflict between the Tibetans and the Chinese, and the inevitable duality of progress and tradition, and how the two coexist. The work I planned to make is to be shown at the Mildura Art Centre in 2007 as an installation, so that was used as my framework.

## **You probably had some idea of what could be achieved there in terms of technique and scale. You would have seen Brent Harris's paper pulp and flocking works at the Ian Potter Museum of Art (University of Melbourne).**

Of course! I would have loved to get my hands dirty in the papermaking room but only artists they publish are allowed access to this specialised and expensive area, so knowing that beforehand, I set my sights on learning the flocking technique that Brent had also used to great effect. What I really loved was the velvet back 'void' it created. Flocking also stems from the tradition of textile/wallpaper designs — traditions that I use often in my art practice.

## **One of the most challenging aspects of a short residency is dealing with the pressure of a limited timeframe. How did you come to terms with that?**

I tried to set myself a goal and a starting point before I left Australia, should the trip in Tibet not foster any new ideas quickly. I did not know if I would feel comfortable in the space or if things would come together, so I tried to not stress and just enjoyed making artwork again, as I'd had a whole month away from it. In the end, I got a large amount of work done and the trip to Tibet was so intense it allowed ideas to filter in quickly. I was just lucky it all came together, really.

## **Did the studio facilities meet your needs? Were printers assigned to assist you?**

The facilities were awesome! Although I had etching, screen, litho and relief available to use, I only needed the flocking machine! I did not have printers assist me. However, I had fantastic feedback and help from Eitaro Ogawa, master printer at the STPI, who was always around if I had any questions.

## **What possibilities can you see for the new technical processes you have employed at the STPI?**

From this residency a whole new series is on the horizon. The flocking technique is very interesting and could complement my ambitions for installation work, so I am seriously contemplating purchasing the equipment when I return to Australia — which is very exciting.

## **You continue to use Asian cultural material in your images. As a Westerner making art for an Australian audience, how do you intend us to read the work?**

People see all sorts of things in my work, not necessarily having to understand the finer points of Asian iconography. I think most people pick up on the core nature of my imagery, which reflects the notions of hope/doubt, beauty/decay and truth/lies. Having said that, this new series that has been made at STPI has a direct reference to Tibet and



Belinda Fox *Untitled study 2006*, pigment, flocking and cut-outs on paper, 70 x100 cm

China, so there are key symbols used in some of the work. My aim is not to get so specific that it marginalises an audience, but I want to deal with a real issue and to do that I need to use particular symbols.

**Do you think an artist travelling/working in Asia for a time can get a clear picture of the culture?**

I have travelled a lot over the years to Asia and I find it endlessly inspiring. I think my work will always be from an outside perspective — that is where I sit. I am not sure if what I see as a traveller is just a mirror of my own beliefs, or if as an outsider I see more clearly because I am not in the thick of it. In the end, I think I see a culture from my Melbournian Western eyes, because that is my base. But being in a completely different culture allows you to see more clearly things that matter to you and perhaps your perspective of the world without the clutter of everyday life.

**You still employ printmaking techniques in your work, but much of it is now large-scale mixed media. Do you still see a place for editioned prints?**

Definitely! I am just enjoying working on unique images at present. This way I can work through ideas more quickly and not be held back by the labour of editioning. Developing ideas is my priority at present.



From left Belinda Fox, STPI printer KC and Korean artist Chun Kwang Young

**If you could do the residency all over again, would you change the way you worked?**

No, I wouldn't change anything. I have the final two weeks to see Singapore. My reason to come to Singapore was to work at the STPI; my reason to visit Tibet was to 'be' there. It has been a great balance. These final two weeks working as a printer have been equally rewarding. Having the opportunity to work with the famous Korean artist Chun Kwang Young has been a highlight, actually. I am extremely lucky to be here at this time to be a part of a major STPI project. It is fascinating to work with such huge presses and to see how a large project evolves. I also miss working collaboratively with printers (since leaving Port Jackson Press Australia) so it has been refreshing to be part of a team again.

For more information about Belinda Fox, see [www.belindafox.com.au](http://www.belindafox.com.au)

**Katherine McDonald** is a freelance writer and curator, based in Melbourne

*Belinda Fox's residency was supported by the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council and the Ian Potter Cultural Trust.*



Belinda Fox was a Print Council commissioned artist in 2002.

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# Singapore Residency





Slaughterhouse-Five

# THE FIRE-BOMBER KURT VONNEGUT, JR.

A DUTY-DANCE WITH DEATH

BY  
COURTNEY  
NOW

...GERMAN-AMERICAN  
...CIRCUMSTANCES  
...FOR ONE TOO MUCH,  
AS A PRISONER OF WAR,  
OF DRESDEN IN COMBAT,  
"THE FIRE-BOMBERING  
AND SUICIDE BOMBING  
OF THE CITY OF DRESDEN IN  
GERMANY,  
THE ELBE."  
...THE TALE  
...SCHIP  
...AMADOR  
...SAYS





## **CV (Abbreviated)**

### **SOLO EXHIBITIONS**

- 2007 Backwards-Forwards, Fremantle Arts Centre, WA  
Camouflage, Art House Gallery, Sydney
- 2006 Balancing Act, Art House Gallery, Sydney
- 2005 Shadow of a doubt, Art House Gallery, Sydney
- 2003 At the Still Point, Art House Gallery, Sydney
- 2001 MetaNarrative, Helen Gory Galerie, Melbourne

### **GROUP EXHIBITIONS**

- 2007 Busan Print Festival, Korea (Australian Representative)  
This is not a print show, Plimsoll Gallery, TAS (touring)  
Loka, with Marine Ky, Beaver Galleries, ACT
- 2006 Flaming Youth, Orange Regional Gallery, NSW  
Three Australian Artists, with GW Bot, Margie Sheppard, Lane  
Gallery, NZ  
The artist/the printmaker, Australian Art Resources, Melbourne
- 2005 Print Out, Burnie Regional Gallery, TAS  
Up to Speed, with Melinda Schawel, Beaver Galleries, ACT
- 2004 Even, Mildura Arts Centre, VIC
- 2003 Nexus, PJPA, Melbourne
- 2002 Confluence, Warrnambool Regional Gallery, VIC  
Crossroads, Broken Hill City Gallery, NSW  
Sojourn, Beaver Galleries, ACT
- 2001 Concurrent, PJPA, Melbourne

### **SELECTED AWARDS/PROJECTS**

- 2007 Burnie Print Prize (Winner)  
Crown Casino Macau Commission
- 2006 Ian Potter Cultural Trust Grant  
Australian Council Grant
- 2005 Robert Jacks Drawing Prize, Bendigo, VIC (Finalist)
- 2004 Silk Cut Award, Melbourne (Winner)  
Ian Potter Cultural Trust Grant (artist and printer exchange USA)
- 2002 Print Council of Australia Commission 2002 (edition of 40 prints)  
Arts Victoria Grant (Darwin printer mentorship)
- 2001 Pat Corrigan Artist Grant (catalogue for three travelling shows)
- 2000 Arts Victoria Grant (artist-in-schools project)
- 1996 Student Union Award, Victoria College of the Arts  
Canson Printmaking Award (Travelling Exhibition VIC, NSW, QLD)

### **SELECTED COLLECTIONS:**

Artbank, National Gallery of Australia ACT, Print Council of Australia VIC Banyule City Council VIC, Burnie Art Gallery TAS, Swan Hill Regional Gallery VIC, Gladstone Regional Art Gallery QLD, Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery QLD Warrnambool Art Gallery VIC, Mildura Arts Centre VIC, Queen Victoria Museum & Gallery TAS, Parliament House ACT, Gold Coast Art Gallery QLD, Charles Sturt University NSW, Queensland University of Technology Art Museum QLD, BHP Billiton VIC

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