

On Parr: materiality and intent in the preservation of Mike Parr's prints in the collection of the National Gallery of Australia

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ABSTRACT

Mike Parr is one of Australia's most eminent and provocative conceptual artists. His twenty-six year collaboration with master printmaker John Loane has seen the creation of over two thousand prints, which have become increasingly unconventional in their use of materials and printmaking techniques. The National Gallery of Australia (NGA) holds a significant collection of Parr's prints, including the first black and white etching through to some of the most recent experimental works (Butler & Williams 2013). This collection continues to grow through new acquisitions and donations, however the materials and techniques used in their creation remain largely undocumented, presenting a significant challenge for their long-term preservation and display.

Through art historical research, interviews with artist and printer, visual examination and analysis of two case study works from the NGA collection, this study aims to develop knowledge about Parr's use of materials and techniques and how they relate to the meaning, function, conservation and display of his prints. This paper also explores the artist's intentions and views on the long-term preservation of his prints, with recent developments in Parr's use of both traditional and non-traditional materials and techniques resulting in a paralleled shift in the artist's earlier views on visual change. Preliminary recommendations have been made for works held in the NGA collection, which are, by virtue of the materials used, relevant also to works held in other public and private collections.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Leah Williams has a background in fine arts, with specialisations in photography, printmaking and drawing. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts, National Art School (1999); Bachelor of Fine Arts Honours, Victorian College of the Arts (2007); Master of Fine Arts by Research, Victorian College of the Arts (2010) and is a recent graduate of the Master of Cultural Materials Conservation at the University of Melbourne in Paper Conservation (2014). Over the last two years, Leah has interned at the Australian National Maritime Museum, the Australian War Memorial, the National Gallery of Australia and the State Library of Victoria. She has also participated in volunteer conservation projects at the RSL LifeCare War Museum and The Dax Centre and recently completed a short course in bookbinding at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. Leah is currently working as a volunteer in paper conservation at the State Library of Victoria and Museum Victoria.

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