



Sydney Symposium 2004

## Bea Maddock AM

Lynda Black

Having been asked to present a paper at a symposium relating to collaborative work with Bea Maddock I saw myself at the tail end of a long line of staff from the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston, (otherwise known as the Queen Vic. or, shorter still, the QV) all of whom have been serious collaborators. Over several years this has involved four curators, three conservators, two technicians, one museum photographer and of course the Director, who has welcomed, encouraged and supported the relationships.

So, this is a summary of a history of collaboration between Bea and the QV. Many of our staff know her and are aware to a greater or lesser degree how close these working relationships are or have been.

There have been several facets to this collaboration, rather like a two way street with major intersections, destination not

always known. However, by definition, the nature of the work has meant that we have all been going in the same direction, at the same time and whether individually or collectively, have gained insight, understanding and a mutual respect for the goals reached.

Bea, in her keynote address, spoke from her perspective. From our perspective the QV benefits are wide and far reaching; several people have had the privilege of working closely with a remarkable artist; and the QV collections have been significantly enriched by the artist's generous and major donations to the Fine Art, Decorative Art and Community History collections.

For me, what makes my role interesting is that the creator of these collections is part of our local community and not only is she making these collections publicly available but she is proactive in its exacting and comprehensive documentation. Bea has

opened up her world to enable the collaborative process to take place and, as the conservation profession evolves, we too have seen the benefits of and seek to further such connections. Others and myself have been privileged to have had certain insights and conversations in order that our joint objectives could be reached.

And what exactly is this work?

To back track to 1964. The QV was the first public collecting institution to purchase works by Bea Maddock then a young artist exhibiting for the first time since returning from her London training.

Thirty years later, the now well-established Conservation Department was to find itself in a state of collaboration, albeit unplanned, with the artist.

For a regional museum and art gallery, the QV is unusual in that it has a large Conservation Department relative to the Museum's overall staffing. An important element of the Department's role is to facilitate the process of both physical and intellectual access to the collections. The Director, Chris Tassell, has an open mind to the work that can come out of this Department and so in 1996 Therese Mulford, Paintings Conservator, during research for an exhibition *Tasmanian Framemakers 1830 - 1930*, sought volunteer assistance for some hand-written signage. Bea Maddock telephoned Therese in response to this request and thus communication was established. At the time Bea was working on *Terra Spiritus* and invited Therese to her studio to have a look. From this came a suggestion that Therese document the making of the work. Consequently, *Terra Spiritus...with a darker shade of pale: following Bea Maddock's Journey* was produced in video format and in limited edition book format. This was an intensive project involving hours of discussion, interviews and script writing with subsequent filming by the Museum photographer, John Leeming. Therese sought funding through the Museum's commercial conservation service by carrying out extensive treatments on

Italian 18th century paintings from Woolmers Estate.

Meanwhile in Paper Conservation, during 1998 Paper Conservator Vicki Warden, and Technical Officers Tamara Hollister and Roy Mathers worked with Bea to design and produce a matting, framing, hanging, storage and transportation system for what had become a highly complex and vulnerable 52 piece work with which many of you may be familiar.

The QV was to be the first venue to exhibit the work and so offered to assist Bea with all necessary requirements to exhibit and travel the work to international standards.

Vicki met with the artist and over detailed discussions and note taking established what the artist's criteria were. They then set about the practical details of how to develop and implement a system.

Essentially, *Terra Spiritus* is a work which needs to be read in two ways: each sheet as an individual object and all 52 sheets as one whole unit. The framing system has been designed for exhibition use only. An additional system has been developed for storage and international transit requirements and is accompanied by a comprehensive manual illustrating the work's installation, de-framing and pack-up.

Vicki records her experience of the project,

At the opening of the exhibition, I felt a moment of real sadness as I realised that was the end of my working relationship with Bea. We had been working on this project for about 9 months.....The addition of Bea to our work space created a competitive environment that kept each of us going. We were vying to produce the best possible product, striving for excellence.....one final quote from Bea, which I believe sums up our collaborative working experience and the *Terra Spiritus* work in total - 'I don't cause problems, I create excellence'.

For Therese the *Terra Spiritus* project lead onto further interviews and documentation of other works as Bea cleared out and

moved from one of her Launceston based studios. It was now 2001 and there would be twelve months of intense correspondence between Bea and Therese. As Therese was in England for much of this time, correspondence was via email and this was to form the basis of the current Catalogue Raisonne project Volume I. This has now become a rigorous academic catalogue of all known work produced by the artist between 1957 and 1983.

Once the process had begun it was only a matter of time before the project involved the two Fine Art Curators, the Decorative Art Curator and again, the Museum Photographer who is producing close to a thousand catalogue images on a CD ROM.

It was at this stage that I was asked to become involved with the print-making aspects of the catalogue. Having come from a fine art print-making background the territory was familiar to me and though at first the prospect seemed daunting, it was an opportunity I could not turn down.

I was to assist with catalogue details (prints only) and also to write some support notes referencing the printmaking processes, materials and techniques used by Bea during this period.

Over a period of several months I would spend the best part of a working day sitting beside Bea looking at photocopied images of her prints and at times their related drawings and paintings. Bea would prepare for each session a thick, spiral bound document which contained work from each period of time: Slade School of Art, Launceston, South Melbourne etc. Bea would talk in detail, recounting context, studio facilities, processes, materials and tools whilst I took notes, making references to marks on images, asking questions and clarifying information. It was important for me to gain an understanding into some of the more complex processes used as well as seeing her work in the wider Australian and international context. This meant knowing what the major influences and innovations

were and when they occurred, knowing which were the key works of each period, separating fact from interpretation of image and keeping focused on the overall objectives of the Catalogue Raisonne.

We would look in detail at how each work was constructed, which techniques were used and in which order, then how it was printed and which inks, papers etc were used. We would check the edition numbers and cataloguing details which in itself was another aspect of the project running simultaneously with Bea and the Fine and Decorative Art Curators.

My notes and writings could easily have filled a book, but as with Bea's work, only the bare essentials are important. The technical writings of four people are currently being merged into one of the chapters with an overall style that is essentially factual, chronological and objective.

The first draft is to be completed in August 2004 and the completed catalogue is due to be published in 2005.

#### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Lynda Black trained as a Paper Conservator at Gateshead Technical College, Newcastle-Upon-Tyne UK in 1984 having completed Honours and Masters degrees in Printmaking at Newcastle-Upon-Tyne and Manchester. Lynda has worked as a conservator in UK, Zanzibar and Australia for various collecting institutions and is also a practicing visual artist. She is the Paper Conservator at the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery.

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