



Marian Hosking, *Bead Rivet Pattern Plate*, 1996, 30cm diameter, 925 silver. Photo: Isamu Sawa.

Flowers flocks fields

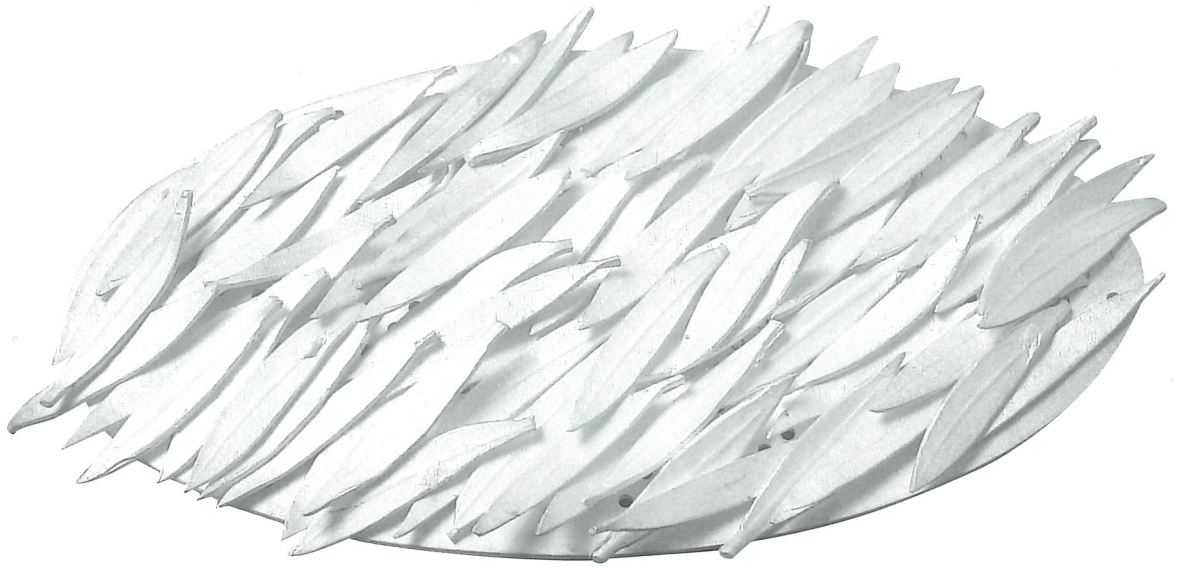
IN LIGHT OF RECENT EXHIBITIONS IN MELBOURNE AND SYDNEY, **ALEX SELENITSCH** DISCUSSES PROCESS AND INSPIRATION IN THE WORK OF **MARIAN HOSKING**, ONE OF AUSTRALIA'S MOST INFLUENTIAL JEWELLERS

WHERE SHOULD I BEGIN? THE BLANK PAPER IS WHERE A WRITER BEGINS AND HERE, ALMOST IMMEDIATELY, IS THE CLUE: a blank sheet of white upon which something is written. In Marian Hosking's brooches, dishes and boxes there is a white metal surface onto which something is marked. Or rather, there is a reflective, light metal plate onto which something is drawn, and into which something is drilled and then fixed. This is a working method that Marian Hosking has pursued for over two decades, with occasional shifts and surprising developments, but with her work always demonstrating this same starting point.

There are a number of reasons why Marian Hosking's work suggests a causal narrative or meditation on beginnings. The first of these is the visual quality of the textured patterns of holes and cuts made through the surfaces of her metal works. However geometric and artificial these holes are in origin and execution, the suggestion of natural organisms is equally strong. The patterns seem to flow out of nature and back into it, or maybe into nature and back out of it. The clarity of the geometry ensures that the works don't become botanical illustrations, and this leads to the second reason. For many European Australians, nature is increasingly being hybridised with ideas of identity and history and hence cultural origins. These ideas allow Hosking's patterns to be seen as representations of social structures. Thirdly, and most directly, Hosking's works demonstrate a process of drawing, cutting and fixing which shows these operations as a defining sequence.

In this sequence, Hosking's pieces tell a story that is easy to understand as a technical display, a creation story or a social image. The artist designates an arena of play, and in this relatively neutral space, disperses a pattern of holes. Hosking derives these patterns from graphics, drawings and photographs of vegetation, and sometimes from botanical drawings. In some of her boxes, inspiration has been provided by existing buildings with lattice-like skins. Wherever it comes from, the source pattern is turned into a template black-on-white image, often through photocopying and its associated ease of reduction and miniaturisation. When the patterns are transferred onto flat sheets of metal, the black bits are cut through the plate to form holes with deep shadows, contrasting with the sheen at the surface of the metal. The effect can often be reversed when the thin plate is held up to the light revealing even more geometric sequence and connections to natural constructions like webs.

In the case of brooches made of pearl-shell an extra effect occurs: the surface of the shell has a visual atmosphere in depth and the deep cuts in shadow come forward as solid objects against the cloudy space. In many works, real lumps of matter come forward to continue the creation story. In this manner, Hosking's brooches can vary from having a brief scatter of detritus to a complete cover. Nearly always loosely fixed, these tiny things sometimes move when touched or when the brooch is moved.



Marian Hosking, *Leaves*, 2000, 925 Silver. Photo: Danielle Thompson.

Hosking also makes necklaces and bracelets which she calls chains. These continue the plate/hole/foilage story in that the foliage is freed of its matrix and joined end to end, bringing to mind the making of garlands out of real flowers. In Hosking's chains all the joins are minutely different to each other due to the particular shapes of each piece. This means the whole chain has the same balance of similarity and difference that characterises her brooches and boxes.

The chains however work in a different way to the brooches when worn. While the brooches have a backing—the plate and then the clothing of the wearer—the chains are in close contact with the shape of the wearer's body, and may even touch the skin. The chain thus works as a drawing over the body with complex lines being suggested through the different 'axes' of the floral units, their various overlaps, and the changing curves of placement on the individual wearer.

Some of Hosking's patterns are periodic repeaters but most are fields, that is, single cells scattered in a formation which is regular but variable. Like a flock of birds or leaves in a tree, there is overall coherence with individual variation, not through a universal grid-like

discipline, but through the localised application of rules of proximity, desire and so on. Compositional relationships or sensibilities are between individual points or particles and movement of one affects all others, however slightly. The field is an image (if not the actual physics) of accumulation of living organisms or bodies rather than the space packing of unconscious cells, whether these are plants spread across the ground, or herds of animals, or people in groups.

While the selection of patterns, types of foliage and birds, and the details of the specific composition are recognisably Hosking's, the field effects make each work a social representation. Her patterns become us, not as fixed structures, but as unique situations, same and different every time. Wearing a Hosking brooch or chain shows that we are singular organisms in a larger field, or the arena of many micro fields, with a creation story shimmering between.

Alex Selenitsch is a poet, architect and senior lecturer in Architecture at the University of Melbourne.

The exhibition *Scattered Similarities* by Marian Hosking can be seen at Object galleries, Sydney from 6 September to 7 October 2001.