

## QUESTIONING THE PRACTICE

DIANA KLAOSEN LOOKS AT AN AMBITIOUS CONTEMPORARY CRAFT CURATORS PROGRAM IN TASMANIA: A RECENT JOINT PROJECT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA AND CAST TOURING.

With the appointment of their first Craft Curator in Residence, the University of Tasmania and Contemporary Art Services Tasmania (CAST) Touring have commenced collaboration in a newly co-ordinated program of craft exhibitions, specifically developed for the National Exhibition Touring Service (NETS) circuit and its various audiences.

A sequence of three Curators-in-Residence over the next three years will produce up to six exhibitions which critically analyse the issues confronting craft practice today and articulate these to national and international audiences. The program is entitled Questioning the Practice. Conceptual emphasis is being placed upon the notion of craft, both through the development of critical strategies, and an exploration of its location within contemporary visual culture. Paul Zika (Chair of the program's selection committee) explains the background to Questioning the Practice: "The University of Tasmania, (both Hobart and Launceston Schools of Art) offers a broad mix of fine art, craft and design studio options, so that issues pertaining to the crafts are continually viewed

considered, strong curatorial exhibitions confronting issues of contemporary craft. Questioning the Practice addresses this problem with the advantage of support and co-operation from a number of important specialist arts bodies.

Art Schools within the new university structure have spearheaded a shift in cultural discourse and are applying this discourse to craft disciplines. It is within this context of conceptual and theoretical re-appraising of its craft activities, and through a range of new courses, research and exhibition initiatives, that this project is taking shape.

For example, the School at Hobart has established a Centre for Furniture Design and a Ceramics Editions Unit, and through them a commitment to arts-based industry strategies. The School at Launceston operates the Pilot Art Foundry and recently established the Strategic Research Centre for Ceramics in Architecture. In Hobart there is Hunter Island Design Centre incorporating the Tasmanian Development Company and the Tasmanian Designer-Makers Co-operative—new initiatives in forging links between the crafts and industry.

The recipient of the first Curatorship Residency is Clare Bond, a former Hobart-based ceramic artist and Honours graduate of the Tasmanian School of Art, who was until recently Touring officer with CAST. Clare has lived and worked in several centres around Australia and in Fiji, and her professional

pejorative notion of 'the handmade' and making things 'for use'. These are problematic and limiting definitions of what craft can be and what it is seen as historically. I prefer the term 'decorative art'. That's a more open term and it allows for more conceptual practice as well as the functional. It also allows for industrial practice and design, whereas 'craft' doesn't have those connotations. It's an outdated term and it's limited."

Clare notes a lack of credibility afforded to people who write and curate—as if one were not serious about one's engagement with art: "As if you're some sort of parasite, living off the creative efforts of others. That's a perception I want to dispel, too," she says. "It's very heartening when you write about a work—or feature it in a show—and the artist tells you that you've brought out something in the work that they've wanted to express but were unable to articulate by themselves." Clare will explore the notions of 'surface' and the 'decorative' that inform her writing and curating with two exhibitions. "The first one, entitled *Containment* looks at the surface as barrier or point of resistance to the viewer. The other show is (provisionally) entitled *In Praise of Make-up* which examines the surface as a point of seduction—as an invitation. It will be about tactility and a sensory response to the work rather than necessarily a conceptual response to the work. It will probably be a very decorative show—I don't see 'decorative' as a disparaging term."

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within the context of the broader visual arts picture." The University has also established an exhibition program with a reputation for strong curatorial research and development.

In 1996/97, CAST Touring is intending to tour *Skin Deep* (addressing decoration and craft) and the *Craft Show* (on authorship in the utilitarian object)—both initiated by Plimsoll Gallery. This Gallery, located within the University of Tasmania, recently curated two craft exhibitions for tour to South East Asia: *Vessel as Subject* (ceramics) toured to five venues in Indonesia and *Pins and Needles* (jewellery) was staged at three venues in Thailand.

Despite the positive collaborations between the University and CAST Touring, (and other separate initiatives) there is still a dearth of

experience has encompassed business administration, arts writing and curatorship and her own—mainly ceramics—art practice. Clare has curated or coordinated some seven exhibitions since 1994 and has been widely published in Australia. Having a background in decorative arts and experience as a curator, Clare felt that she and the Craft Curators Program would be well suited. As she says "It's a rare thing—a luxury—to be offered a position in the arts where you can pursue your own interests and be paid to do it. I'm passionate about curating, I really enjoy creating a dialogue between works."

'Craft' is not a term Clare likes to use: "I think it's a very loaded term. It evokes visions of 1970s brown pots and macrame. It's the

Clare is interested in the interconnection of art, architecture and the decorative arts and in what happens to art objects when they are removed from the gallery context and juxtaposed with a variety of other objects. The decorative arts, she says, have been overlooked and under-researched. The 'craft versus art' question has hijacked the debate and there are many other areas waiting to be investigated.

There is something pejorative about finding a special vocabulary to discuss craft. "Go to the object and work from there." Clare says, "Don't try to make it fit what you want to say."

Diana Klaosen is a Hobart-based writer and curator who earlier this year completed her Masters of Fine Arts degree at the Tasmanian School of Art.

## AUSTRALIAN ENAMEL SYMPOSIUM

CAROLYN DELZOPPO DISCUSSES THE INAUGURAL AUSTRALIAN ENAMEL SYMPOSIUM.

A very successful inaugural Australian Enamel Symposium was held in Brisbane, 26–29 September, while workshops, before and after the Symposium, extended the event over 14 days. Thirty enamellers from WA, NT, VIC, SA, NSW and QLD attended, as well as three international visitors—from the US, the Netherlands and New Zealand.

Tom Ellis, from Thompson Enamel Company in the US, gave the keynote address. There were many presentations on artists and their works from around the world and a practical session on photographing enamels. Other sessions included hands-on tool and technique demonstrations, a slide presentation on the manufacture of enamels at the Thompson factory, a round-table discussion on health issues, the screening of a video on the making of the *Daintree Mural*, and a visit to Brisbane International Airport to see the mural in situ, and much more. Three days filled to the brim.

In conjunction with the Symposium, two exhibitions were held. A major exhibition, *Expressions in Glass*, at Robert Hughes Gallery in the city, featured more than 100 enamel works from all over Australia, the US, the Netherlands, Germany and Spain. There was also a solo exhibition of small enamel paintings at Gallery 482 in Fortitude Valley, Brisbane, by South Australian Jenny Gore.

The enduring value of symposia lie in the opportunity they give for personal contact. Because so many of us work in isolation from other enamellers, it was especially pleasurable for me to put faces to familiar names. I knew the work—now I know the artist.

The opportunity for exchange of ideas and knowledge, and the stimulation that comes after days of intense concentration on a medium is very satisfying. The value of this Symposium towards improving the well being of the Australian enamel community will be felt for many years to come. The organisers, Anna Margot and Chris Collins, are to be

congratulated on their initiative.

Plans are already underway for the next Australian Enamel Symposium in 1998.

Carolyn Delzoppo is an enameller and metal artist based in Mullumbimby, NSW. She is Editor of the Australian Enamel Newsletter.

Janet Baker, *Beauty is Skin Deep*, 1996. Brooch. Camplévé and Cloisonné. Sterling Silver, Fine Silver.



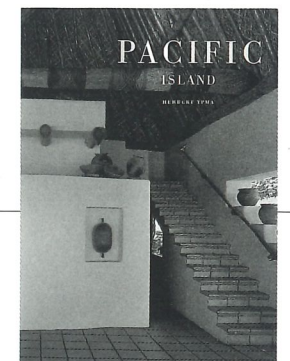
## PACIFIC DESIGN

MAUD PAGE REVIEWS THE BOOK *PACIFIC ISLAND* BY HERBERT YPMA (THAMES & HUDSON) 1996.

*Pacific Island* is intended as a 'visual sourcebook' for designers, architects and artists. In this text Herbert Ypma (from *Interior Architecture*) explores the possibilities of a distinctive 'Pacific Style'. *Pacific Island* is visually beautiful, with glossy reproductions that range from sharp black and whites to pages filled with splendid coloured bursts of images placed in a nine-grid system—easily cross-referenced on the following page.

Most of the book is devoted to contemporary designs derived from traditional Pacific arts and crafts practices. Ypma focuses on luxury resorts in Fiji and Bora Bora as well as architecture and interiors in New Zealand, which blend, draw and create a distinctively unique style. Other sections of the text focus on more traditionally based practices and have been interwoven throughout to demonstrate this 'Pacific Style'. The latter includes the well-photographed full body Tattoos, Cook Island coral churches, grassmats, *Tivaevaes* and Maori jewellery and carvings.

By including non-Polynesian artists influenced by South Pacific crafts, practices and motifs, Ypma is able to investigate the possibilities of developing a 'Pacific Styled' hybridity. Through the New Zealander architect Andrew Patterson, Ypma also explores how traditional ideas of space and connections between nature and building are simultaneously continued and transformed to suit contemporary spaces and needs. These concepts are likewise supported through the work and comments of the artist Fatu Feu'u (whose surname is unfortunately mis-spelled in the text). Ypma is equally careful to historically contextualise cultural practices such as tattooing, and thus manages to offer a



generalised insight into the complexity of these objects, practices and designs.

However, comments accompanying the photographic material would have been more effective had they been less patronisingly praise-worthy—letting the viewers create their own opinions—and provided more detailed descriptions of how the works and designs were created. The repeated use of 'Polynesian simplicity' to describe a Pacific style also has problematic connotations when used alongside other concepts like 'authenticity', 'origins', 'innocence' and 'naivety'. Comments of a 'polluted paradise' and the lamenting of a 'watered-down version of the once pure Polynesian culture', also attest to the use of problematic lenses through which to observe cultures which are subject to continual change through historical processes.

There is no doubt that *Pacific Island* offers a magnificent photographic documentation and textual weaknesses need not distract from its intended use as a designers' tool.