

TRANSCRIPT for the podcast *Object: stories of craft and design*

Season 1: Episode 4 Living Treasure: Master of Australian Craft Marian Hosking

[music]

Lisa Cahill: When you go on a country drive, what do you look out for? An op shop, a bakery or a pub?

Lisa Cahill: For Marian Hosking's mum, it was... plants.

Marian Hosking: She was known to actually put on the brakes and come to a screeching halt on the side of the road ...

[sound of car on gravel, screeching to a stop. Sound of car door opening and footsteps walking on gravel.]

Marian Hosking:... she'd spotted some plant sort of 2, 3, 5 meters further back. She never minded going back.

Lisa Cahill: Growing up, Marian spent a lot of time in the bush, just looking at things. Nature was a remedy too.

Marian Hosking: When I was not happy, she would say, "Okay, let's go for a drive." And it always made you feel better.

Lisa Cahill: And it was nature that inspires Marian's life work.

Marian Hosking: My mother would take me out into the Bush and show me things that she thought were incredible. And so I also believe them to be incredible.

Marian Hosking: This understanding of nature as fantastic and incredible... trying to translate that into jewellery has sustained me for over 50 years.

[theme music]

Lisa Cahill: This is Object ... a podcast about design and contemporary craft in Australia. I'm your host Lisa Cahill from the Australian Design Centre. In Series 1, you'll meet the master craftspeople we call Living Treasures. What makes a Living Treasure? What has driven them to a lifetime love of their craft? Is it the material, or the process, or both? How do they contribute and advocate for the arts? And what's their advice for makers who follow in their footsteps?

Lisa Cahill: Let's meet Living Treasure: Master of Australian Craft jeweller Marian Hosking.

Lisa Cahill: Marian is an award-winning artist, and her work is held in collections worldwide. Marian Hosking is an award-winning artist, and is a former Head of Jewellery at Charles Sturt University, The Riverina College of Advanced Education and Monash University.

Marian was made a Living Treasure by the Australian Design Centre in 2007, and her Living Treasures exhibition toured around Australia from 2008 to 2010.

Marian Hosking collects, draws or takes photos of Australian plants and flowers to make silver objects like broaches, necklaces and vessels.

She often oxidises and heats the silver to blacken it. Using the techniques of drilling and saw piercing, the result is strong yet delicate, detailing fragments of the Australian bush.

In this episode of Object, you'll hear why Marian thinks that souvenirs are underrated, the reason she still makes brooches, and her founding role in the iconic Australian jewellery space, Workshop 3000.

Marian lives and works on the ancestral lands of the Boon Wurrung people, on the Mornington Peninsula in Victoria.

Lisa Cahill: Hello Marian

Marian Hosking: Hi.

Lisa Cahill: Great to have you online.

Marian Hosking: Would have been nice if you could have come to the Peninsula, because it's so beautiful down here. But anyway, another time.

Lisa Cahill: Thanks Marian. So, let's kick off with the questions. Marian, across your whole career, you've interpreted the Australian environment through silver jewellery and vessel work. How do plants, trees and birds offer a continuing challenge and interest?

Marian Hosking: Well, I think sometimes people consider the Australian Bush to be all the same. And for me it's never the same. And so I like to draw attention to something that somebody might consider, "Oh yes, I know what a gum leaf looks like."

But actually, they don't know the range of all the different gum leaves that are available. So I like to draw attention to and isolate a single element or a particular quality.

Lisa Cahill: What's a recent example of that?

Marian Hosking: Ok. So last year in lockdown, when I was first in lockdown, I thought there's no point in making anything because there's already too much of everything in the world. And making things is just a waste of time and space.

But I was able to go five kilometres and just a smidge past five kilometres, I could go to the Tootgarook Swamp. And I noticed the swans, the black swans.

I've worked over a number of years with swans, in England and Australia, the black and the white. These swans and little baby cygnets were just so appealing.

It's also the light that I love when I go to the swamp. The light on the water, the light through the trees and the actual movement of the swans on the water. So I have continued to go and look at those swans on a reasonably regular basis, and I've just completed a swan vessel.

I have depicted that image by drilling holes in a sheet of silver and when the light travels through those holes because it's silver, they glint and gleam and where there are no holes, it looks solid. And where there are holes, it's more transparent.

So I've tried to capture an image of the trees on the edge of the swamp and the swans with the babies on the water in a sheet of silver that has then been turned into a cylinder. In daylight, as the light travels through the cylinder it shows up as the trees and things, but also at night with a candle inside, it glows differently.

Lisa Cahill: Marian, your work has sometimes been described as 'sentimental', how do you feel about that?

Marian Hosking: [laughing] Well in fine art terms, being sentimental or a souvenir is often a derogatory term. What I do is both souvenir and sentimental, and I really value both of those aspects of my making.

The swans is a souvenir of the Tootgarook Swamp.

A souvenir is something that people take away with them. It might be a selfie these days..[a selfie] is a souvenir really. But in the past, it was often an object made by a local crafts person. I have a number of huon pine objects that were made by local Tasmanian craftspeople.

And I have a number of ceramic vessels, going back to even the Merric Boyds, the sort of Australiana. I love the souvenir I have to say.

And so I consider quite often my pieces to be souvenirs of a place that I have loved or cherished or a plant that I respect and want to bring to people's attention.

And jewellery is quite often sentimental also because it's often gifted, even if the gift is to yourself, it is something that carries sentiment with it. And these are things that I truly value, and have worked with always.

[music]

Katie Scott: Marian's work really hit me from the very first moment I saw it for its beauty, more than anything else. Which I know these days is not such a popular thing to say about an object, that it's 'beautiful'.

Lisa Cahill: Katie Scott is the owner and director of Melbourne's Gallery Funaki.

Katie Scott: But I think Marian's work is really fearlessly beautiful. And initially that beauty can be a little bit distracting. So it wasn't until I spent a bit more time with the work, that it was really the exhaustive and really personal nature of her research that stood out.

So you get this sense of the sheer breadth of Marian's experience and her kind of intellectual inquiry, not just around plants but around the historical traditions of silver smithing.

I also see Marian's work as quite closely related to photography.

I really see Marian as incredibly talented at framing small sections of nature for us, so that we can kind of extrapolate the larger from these details. And so while I've always kind of found that there's this comfort of the miniature in her work - the domesticated, the small and the accessible depart souvenir that we can take with us.

It also gives this hint beyond that, beyond that frame of something fairly huge and sublime, which I think is really what Marian feels about Australian landscapes.

[music]

Lisa Cahill: So what was it about silver that first drew you in?

Marian Hosking: Well, I didn't want to work in gold and diamonds and precious gems. I didn't want the value of what I made to be around the material value of the materials incorporated into it. And I was quite interested in Scandinavian design and silver was much used by Henning Koppel and the Scandinavian silversmiths.

I work very graphically, so I draw and cut out and silver suited me. It's got a low sheen. You can build up layers. I work pretty much low relief.

I mainly make brooches. Nobody wears brooches. Nobody has ever really worn brooches. But I do love making brooches still.

Why do I love brooches? A brooch is a contained object. It's in and of itself. I don't have pierced ears, so I rarely make earrings. I am increasingly trying to make necklaces. But a brooch is just like a snapshot. It's contained.

Back in the day, back in the Workshop 3000 days, I considered a brooch to be a bit like a t-shirt with a tag on it. That it says something about yourself and it says something to the onlooker and it's a comfort to yourself as well. I have a fabulous cuttlefish brooch that Catherine Truman made.

Marian Hosking: It's like having a little friend along with you. What we wear is sometimes worn to say something to somebody else about ourselves, but it's also a comfort to ourselves.

Lisa Cahill: You've contributed to the jewellery sector in many ways through founding and running a studio to teaching and mentoring. What was Workshop 3000?

Marian Hosking: Workshop 3000 was established from the instigation of Su San Cohn.

And I was quite happy to have my own little studio at home and work on my own. But she thought that it would be good to have somewhere that was a focal point and that other people could access. And that would be a stimulus for the whole community in Melbourne.

And so Harry Rowlands, Cohn and myself managed to get some funding from the Australia Council to help us. And we put in money as well to buy equipment and set up a workshop that became an access workshop. And that operated with a number of people going through there that have gone on to be bigger and better.

So Workshop 3000 was established in 1980/81.

3000 is the postcode for Melbourne. So the fact that the workshop was in the city of Melbourne, was right in the heart of Melbourne in the CBD was a very important aspect of that workshop. And so it was accessible to people from internationally and locally. You could rent space to use the equipment. We had some people doing traineeships there. And I participated in it until my son was born in 1984, that I moved out of Workshop 3000 to my home workshop, with two small children.

And Su San still has the title of Workshop 3000 and it was a wonderful venture.

[music]

Su San Cohn: Marian was my teacher. She's an influential generous teacher and has always been an advocate for the craft and particularly in jewellery. And that was one of the things that drew me to her.

Lisa Cahill: Su San Cohn is one of Australia's finest jewellers and metalworkers. She is the co-founder and Director of Workshop 3000.

Su San Cohn: I remember with one piece I was making and it was drilling very fine holes into stone. Lots of them. She stayed back after everyone left, particularly so that I could just drill these holes carefully and in peace. She was that sort of caring teacher.

Su San Cohn: The workshop was essentially set up in my final year at RMIT. I knew I'd always need a workshop and I would need equipment that was in art school. At that stage you couldn't go back into art school and use any of the equipment. And sort of figured if I needed to use it, so other people would need to use it.

I approached Marian about it and she understood the idea and saw the value of it. And at that stage, there wasn't any model in this country for an access workshop.

There were cooperative workshops where people would make a line of production work. Like say a coffee mug or something like that. But nothing that worked where the space and the equipment was available to hire and people were independent.

And I suppose the workshop was also about, how do you get that feedback once you leave art school? That was always part of the workshop, that collaborative base of it.

Mind you, neither of us knew that we also would have to do psychology degrees to manage something like that. [laughing] The people side of it. Marian had her teaching experience but she had to put up with me being forthright about how things should be done, and my vision and I cringe sometimes when I have memories of being very bolshie about stuff.

Su San Cohn: I think her credibility, the fact that she already had an established practice, helped enormously with giving the workshop a credibility. And she essentially mentored me on how to grow into the role of managing the workshop.

She has a passion for what she does and a passion for the field. And in that is this commitment to constantly moving, constantly developing, knowing what's going on around her and in that there's huge support for others. I think she's a fantastic role model.

Lisa Cahill: Marian, where did you grow up and was there making in your family?

Marian Hosking: I grew up on the coast of Beaumaris, just outside Melbourne.

It wasn't as suburban as other parts of Melbourne, there were still orchards. There were still plants that were indigenous to the area. There were no made streets apart from Tramway Parade and Beach Road. And as kids, we were allowed to just roam. We had to come home if either the streetlights came on. Or my mother had a gong, which I still have, that she would ring. And if we heard the gong or the lights came on, we had to go home.

There was this slightly, not so much Bohemian, but a group of people that originally built their own little houses in Beaumaris who really liked living close to nature.

It attracted people who appreciated the Australian bush. My mum fought for years to have some land preserved in its natural state.

And she also fought for years to have Australian native trees planted as street trees instead of exotics in the streets of Melbourne.

And my mother was a great lover of things handmade. When she married, she insisted they get the furniture made by a craftsperson. My father found that a little bit daunting, to see his hard-earned cash disappear to this man who kept saying, "Oh, it's up here, I haven't quite worked out what I'm making yet."

Although my mother did do pottery classes, she was more a conservationist than a maker, but she appreciated making. As did my father who had a steel foundry. He also understood the importance of materials and respect of materials and the process of making.

Lisa Cahill: How are you feeling about the state of the environment with the 2020 bushfires and loss of habitat and our focus on climate change?

Marian Hosking: 2020, just with the fires and then Covid, it just became almost too much. The fires were probably the most devastating. The sky was always full of smoke. I live amongst bushland but I knew that I wasn't about to burn.

But I felt for the people who were burning.

I went to a wetlands day in 2020. I cried at the Smoking Ceremony because we were not looking after the land.

[music and Australian bird sounds]

Katie Scott: The word Marian Hosking is just synonymous with how we think about Australian examinations of natural landscapes, which is traditionally a huge feature of our jewellery.

Lisa Cahill: Katie Scott is the owner and director of Melbourne's Gallery Funaki.

And it's got its locus in the environmental movements of the 1970s and even earlier, and because Marian's mother was a really passionate conservationist.

Katie Scott: There's a link through with Marian's jewellery to that earlier time, when a lot of Australians really began to appreciate that our landscape was fragile and that it needed protection. So I mean, her early works really talked directly to campaigns like the Franklin River Dam and Lake Pedder in Tasmania.

I also think that in terms of why her work is so beloved and it is, it's so deeply loved by so many people.

Katie Scott: And I feel like there's a kind of revelatory joy that she offers us. When she, when she kind of makes these fragments of this larger whole, and we can take them away and wear them and keep them close and treasure them. But they're souvenirs, not just a place, but I think often of a shared experience between the artist and the wearer. And I think for a lot of people, that's why they find her work so precious because they identify really closely with it.

[music]

Lisa Cahill: What would you say has been your biggest creative challenge and why?

Marian Hosking: Well at the beginning, that would have been just to keep going to try and find somewhere to place the work. Because back in the seventies, before the

Meat Market even, before the craft centres, before the craft councils, it was very hard to get your work accepted into venues. There was a craft gallery in South Yarra, but they were few and far between. So being able to keep trying and keep making was difficult, But things moved on and you just keep going.

Lisa Cahill: Do you think it's easier today?

Marian Hosking: No, no, no. I don't think it's any easier today. I think that it's very disappointing that to me, it seems that art is pushed to the side. Particularly performance, you know, music, performance, theatre, dance because they are often companies, but the individual artist, I think suffers quite a lot in Australia.

So it is difficult. I've been very fortunate to have support from the government over my lifetime, but I do think it's very difficult for young makers today to find support from both the institutions, the universities, which are closing art schools all over the place and also from government. It's hard.

It's a shift, I mean, we've gone to a digital world. My son works in CGI, so I know that there's value in computer generated things. But I really think that we still need the real making, transacting. We've lost manufacturing. We've lost making to a large extent.

And I think that's a shame because I do believe that on the Mornington Peninsula. I can buy locally produced tomatoes, strawberries, cabbages, whatever's in season from the farmer's gate. But I think that the same should be, with the quality of your clothes, your jewellery, the things that you, your furniture that it's much nicer if it's made locally.

Lisa Cahill: That's certainly what, you know, what we're trying to do here at ADC, through our shop and, you know, through everything we do really is put that emphasis on the handmade. And try and encourage people to support Australian made work and really value the objects that they bring into their lives.

Lisa Cahill: Is there one thing that stands out for you Marian from all that you've achieved?

Marian Hosking: Well, of course the Living Treasures was pretty outstanding. But also, I don't consider myself to be really competition material. But I did win the Collin and Cecily Design Award in 2012. I felt that it was an acknowledgement amongst my peers, really. I think that was the aspect of it that I valued. I was really overawed by that, I have to say.

Lisa Cahill: Marian, how does one achieve mastery of a craft practice? What does it involve or what does it involve for you?

Marian Hosking: It involves keeping it and persistence. I think that it's hard when you, when you get knock-backs and you don't know where to put your work or your work doesn't get accepted into something. I remember when Paul Derrez first came to Australia and he didn't want to stop my work and I felt mortified, but years later he did.

And you just have to keep going. You have to keep making, you have to find something that is true to yourself. I believe that I think that you'll only do well, if you are committed to what you're doing and you persist with it. And the one way to do that is to be really committed to what you do and why you do it.

Lisa Cahill: Jeff Mincham said to me, "Never be fashionable." That was him. That was his line. [laughing]

Marian Hosking: Well, I have had people, in the early days, they'd say, "Oh, such and such is copying this." And there's no point in worrying about somebody looking like your work. You just have to move on, keep going, make your own work.

My work is is like me. It's really important that you find something that is meaningful to *you*, so that you are prepared to spend time exploring it.

Lisa Cahill: That was jeweller Marian Hosking, looking back on nearly 50 years of practice.

I found it interesting how looking closely is a thread through Marian's life and work. And I was reminded yet again of the value of open studios, like Workshop 3000. As spaces for building creative community, training and selling work.

Lisa Cahill: Check out the Show Notes page for photos of Marian's work. It's on our website <https://australiandesigncentre.com/podcast/>

In the next episode of Object, you'll meet master weaver Liz Williamson.

Liz Williamson: A lot of the women that came here, to Australia in the First Fleet and as convicts, they got opportunities because they knew how to darn and could repair household textiles and clothing. So I think that darning plays a really interesting place in history.

Lisa Cahill: If you've enjoyed this episode of Object, we'd love you to rate or review us on iTunes.

Object is a podcast by the Australian Design Centre.

The Gadigal people of the Eora Nation are the traditional custodians of this place we now call Sydney, where the Australian Design Centre is located, and where this podcast was made.

We'd like to thank the Australia Council for the Arts for funding support for this podcast. You can follow the Australian Design Centre on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Object is produced by Jane Curtis in collaboration with Lisa Cahill and Alix Fiveash. Thank you for listening.