

Artspace Mackay – Mackay Regional Council Collection

The Mackay Regional Council Collection was started in the late 1980s by the Mackay City Library and moved to the newly built Artspace Mackay in 2002. The catalyst for both the founding of the collection and the future direction of the collection policy was the gift by Mr Derek Nicholls on behalf of Wilson H.T.M. Ltd. Stock and Sharebrokers, Brisbane of 28 hand coloured lithographs by the nineteenth century naturalist, John Gould, under the Taxation Incentives for the Arts Scheme. These lithographs were originally published in two of Gould most famous publications; eight from *The Birds of The Himalaya Mountains*, published between 1831 and 1832 and 20 from *The Mammals of Australia* published from 1845 to 1863.

A year later, the Mackay City Library hosted an exhibition of engravings from Sir Joseph Bank's *Florilegium* printed from copperplates produced in the 18th century and not published until the 1980s. These plates were created from drawings by Sydney Parkinson of specimens collected by Banks and Daniel Charles Solander during their voyage to Australia aboard James Cook's *Endeavour* 1768-1770. Following the popularity of this exhibition, the Library purchased three examples of these prints with funds donated by the people of Mackay. Continuing the idea of collecting art related to the history of book publishing, the next year the library purchased a collection of 14 signed first edition books, 10 original prints and ephemera by the writer and printmaker Barbara Hanrahan (1939-1991).

In the same year, 1989, Tate Adams, the Australian painter, printmaker and publisher of limited edition artists' books, moved to Townsville from Melbourne and in 1992 re-established his Lyrebird Press with artist Ron McBurnie at James Cook University. The Mackay City Library acquired a copy of every book printed at the press, which included work by many of Australia's leading printmakers. Lyrebird Press closed in 2002 and to commemorate the opening of Artspace Mackay, Tate Adams donated his personal archive to the Mackay City Council. The gift consisted of 216 prints and drawings, 20 Artists' Books and 26 original wood blocks, as well as 30 catalogues and reference books. This generous gift is now housed with the rest of the artists' book collection in the Tate Adams Reading Room within the Artspace Mackay building.

When the Collection moved to the new Cox Rayner designed building, it also included two important groups of watercolours from the Library's Local History Collection. 14 watercolours by local resident, Annie Pring Marten painted around 1872-3, probably sent home to her family in England to give them an impression of her new life in Mackay, were donated in 1968 by Mr Charles Dymore Green, a grandson of Mr and Mrs George Nisbet Marten. The second group of eight botanical watercolours painted in the late 19th century by Mackay resident, Maria Emma McBurney were donated by Lorraine and Simon McDonnell in 2001.

In 2005, Mackay City Council adopted a newly revised Art Collection Policy that maintains the artists' books collection as the core area of collecting, with the introduction of a biennial National Artists' Books Award (The Libris Awards) in 2006 to assist the development of the collection and stimulate awareness of its existence. The Collection is now the most focused collection throughout the regional galleries network in Queensland and is the third largest collection of its kind in Australia after the National Gallery of Australia and the State Library of Queensland.

Among the most significant additions to the collection in the past few years have been the important group of 43 prints in various media and one painting by members of the Lockhart River Art Gang donated by Fran and Geoff Barker through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, 2006. Recent acquisitions to the Artists Books Collection have continued to concentrate on new

work by Australian artists with the majority of acquisitions coming from the *Libris Awards*. However, following a long term strategy to develop a collection that tells the story of the history of artists books, a quarter of the new works that have entered the collection, primarily through donations, have been older works from Australia and overseas that go some way to fill the gaps in this story.

Additions to the international collection have all been from the period 1963 to 1970, aimed at reflecting the emergence of the artist book as a contemporary art form and showing some of the conceptual influences on Australian artists since the late 1960s. In 2008, we purchased the classic Edward Ruscha book *Twenty-six gasoline stations* 1963 which has frequently been cited as the first modern artists book. A year earlier we acquired, with funds provided by the Artspace Foundation, a complete set of William Copley's publication *S.M.S nos.1-6* 1963. Compiled by the American artist William Copley (1919-1996), these portfolios reflect both the diversity of art and the anti-commercial idealism of the time. Copley invited a diverse range of artists, writers and musicians to submit a work of art that was reproduced and included, without comment, in a boxed collection available by mail order subscription with an edition of 2000. Decidedly idealistic in concept and lasting only six issues, the publication included contributions from Copley's surrealist friends and representatives from almost every art movement that was vying for public attention at that time. It includes work by many of the 'pioneers' of artists' books such as Dieter Roth, Bruce Nauman, Lawrence Weiner and Dick Higgins as well as multiples by Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Roy Lichtenstein, Christo, Yoko Ono and On Kawara.

This year, we acquired *Artists & Photographs* published by Multiples Inc. in 1970. This series of artists books, published to coincide with an exhibition at Dwan Gallery, New York, is presented in a box, designed by the artist Dan Graham, and accompanied by a catalogue of the exhibition/project written by Lawrence Alloway. The box contains 17 artists books by artists from America and Europe who were also pivotal to the development of the artists book as a medium. The series includes some classic books such as Bruce Nauman's *LAAIR* and Ed Ruscha's *Babycakes* as well as work by Mel Bochner, Christo, Jan Dibbets, Dan Graham, Douglas Huebler, Alan Kaprow, Michael Kirby, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Richard Long, Robert Morris, Dennis Oppenheim, Robert Smithson, Bernar Venet & Andy Warhol.

Recent additions to the Australian collection start with early publications by Alex Selenitsch and Robert Jacks. Last year, again with funds provided by the Artspace Foundation, we acquired 5 early works by Alex Selenitsch dating from 1969-1973 which represent his unique blend of concrete poetry and conceptual art. We also purchased three of the earliest books by Robert Jacks, *1-12* 1969, *An Unfinished work* 1966-1971 and *Two Four-Part Drawings* 1977 which complement the rubber stamp books from 1978 -1979 already in the collection. Also last year, the Sydney gallery owner, Frank Watters, donated five artists books from his personal library that reflect the conceptual spirit of Australian Art in the 1970s: Imants Tillers' *91 Missing Works* 1973, Ian Howard's *Action Man Story* 1976, Tim Johnson's *Coincidence* 1974, Bob Peacock's *Mid-Year Diary* 1976-77 and Virginia Coventry's *At/to a Point* 1980. In 2009, the Collection received the most significant donation since the Tate Adams gift in 2002. Richard Larter donated, through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program, a collection of 13 original collaged artists books from 1979 -1985. Presented in the format of sixties love comics, these collages combine images of politicians, popular celebrities, cartoons & old master paintings with erotic images from men's magazines.

Other important acquisitions and donations from the 1990s include work by Sebastian di Mauro, Judith Wright, Eugene Carchesio, Ti Parks, Patrick Pound and David Sequeira.

Some of these are altered books on exhibition in our current touring exhibition *Recycled Library: Altered Books* that also includes recent acquisitions of work by Marion Borgelt, Alex Selenitsch, Yvonne Kendall, Archie Moore and Jánis Nedéla.