

Mackay Regional Council Art Collection

History of the Collection

The Beginnings

The Mackay Regional Council (MRC) Art Collection was initiated by the Mackay City Library in the late 1980s and moved to the newly built Artspace Mackay in 2002. A gift of 28 hand-coloured lithographs from the 19th century naturalist publications *The Birds of The Himalaya Mountains* (1831-32) and *The Mammals of Australia* (1845-63), gifted to the library by Mr Derek Nicholls on behalf of Wilson H.T.M. Ltd. Stock & Sharebrokers under the Taxation Incentives for the Arts Scheme, were the catalyst for both the founding of the collection and the future direction of the collection policy towards book-related prints and drawings.



In 1988, the Mackay City Library hosted an exhibition of engravings from Sir Joseph Banks's *Florilegium*, a group of prints from copperplates produced in the 18th century from drawings by Banks's principal artist 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 its focus on visual arts related to the history of book publishing, 1989 saw the library purchasing a collection of 14 signed first edition books, 10 original prints and related ephemera by the Australian writer and printmaker Barbara Hanrahan (1939-1991).

The early collection also included two important groups of works on paper from the Mackay City Library's local history collection, which included a gift of 14 watercolours painted in Mackay around 1872-3 by local resident, Annie Pring Marten, donated in 1968 by the artist's descendent Mr Charles Dymore Green; and a group of eight botanical still lifes painted in the late 19th century by Mackay resident, Maria Emma McBurney, donated by Lorraine and Simon McDonnell in 2001.

Artspace Mackay

From 1992, the Mackay City Library acquired copies of every book printed in Townsville by the Lyre Bird Press. Tate Adams, the Irish-Australian printmaker and publisher of limited-edition artists' books, moved from Melbourne to Townsville and between 1992-2002 the Lyre Bird Press, lead by Adams and Ron McBurnie, was active at James Cook University. Over these years, the Lyre Bird Press featured many of Australia's leading printmakers. To commemorate the 2002 opening of Artspace Mackay, Adams donated his personal archive to Mackay City Council, consisting of 216 prints and drawings, 20 artists' books and 26 original wood blocks, as well as 30 catalogues and reference books. This generous gift known as the Lyre Bird Press Archive is now housed within the MRC Art Collection.

In 2005, Mackay City Council adopted a newly revised Art Collection Policy that maintained 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 promote and further develop and update the collection.



Among the most significant additions to the collection in the 2010s were the group of 43 prints in various media and one painting by members of the Lockhart River Art Gang—including works by Rosella Namok, Fiona Omeeny and Samantha Hobson—donated by Fran and Geoff Barker through the Cultural Gifts Program in 2006. In the same year, local pottery studio Pioneer Potters Inc. donated 64 ceramic works to Mackay Regional Council. Founded in 1975 by artists including Rick Wood, the Pioneer Potters acquired this collection through seminars, workshops and an annual acquisitive awards that attracted local, national and international artists.

Most acquisitions to the gallery's artists' books collection have continued to concentrate on new work, with the addition of a long-term strategy developed in the 2000s to tell a longer story of artists' books. As a result, the collection also features international artworks that reflect the emergence of the artists' book as a contemporary art form since the late 1960s. In 2008, Artspace Mackay purchased the classic 1963 Edward Ruscha book *Twenty-six gasoline stations*, a frequently cited breakthrough for modern artists' books, and a complete set of William Copley's 1963 publication *S.M.S nos.1-6* thanks to the Artspace Mackay Foundation. In 2011, the gallery acquired the 1970 publication *Artists & Photographs*, a work profiling artists from America and Europe pivotal to the development of the artists' books, including Bruce Nauman, Ed Ruscha, Christo, Alan Kaprow, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Robert Smithson, and Andy Warhol.

The collection of early Australian artists' books was enriched by the 2009 gift by Australian artist Richard Larter, donated through the Cultural Gifts Program. It includes 13 original collaged artists' books, combining found images of politicians, popular celebrities, cartoons, old master paintings, and erotica, created by Larter between 1975-85. In 2012, Sydney gallery owner Frank Watters donated five artists' books from his personal library representing Australian conceptual art highlights from the 1970s—Imants Tillers' *91 Missing Works* of 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 2010, with funds provided by the Artspace Foundation, the gallery acquired five early works by Alex Selenitsch dating from 1969-73 representing his unique blend of concrete poetry and conceptual art. In the same year, the gallery purchased three of Robert Jacks's earliest books, *1-12* (1969), *An Unfinished Work* (1966-1971) and *Two Four-Part Drawings* (1977) to build on his rubber stamp books from 1978 -1979 already in the collection.

Established in 2012, the Visual Arts Advisory Committee provides advice to council on the ongoing development and management of its art collection, and their collection policy continues to guide the growth of the Mackay Regional Council Art Collection. The policy, along with the Art Collection Development Plan endorsed in 2018, recognises the ongoing significance of the artists' books collection as its major focus and also broadens collection priority areas to include works of art by established or emerging contemporary Indigenous artists—a collection area initiated by the Lockhart River Art Gang gift and three works donated in 2009 by Mackay-born Indigenous artist Danie Mellor.

In addition, Mellor's two major drawings *Wambool Yuibera* and *A changing ecology*, were commissioned by BHP Billiton Mitsui Coal, Artspace Mackay Foundation, and Mackay Regional Council in 2012 to observe Mackay's 150th anniversary.

The Artspace Mackay Foundation continued to play a significant role in raising funds for major acquisitions for the Mackay Regional Council Art Collection until 2020. In 2017, the Foundation supported the acquisition of a suite of ceramic works by late Australian ceramist Gwyn Hanssen Pigott entitled *Still life, 9 pieces*. Between 1989 and 2000, Hanssen Pigott lived in Netherdale, west of Mackay, and was a highly regarded part of the Mackay ceramics community. In 2020, the Foundation also raised funds for the purchase of the rare Lyrebird Press artist's book *John Brack: Nudes*, printed in Melbourne in 1982. Over its active years, the Foundation supported the acquisition of 19 works now in the MRC Art Collection.

Public Art

Mackay boasts a rich variety of public art, many of which are in the care of the MRC Art Collection. Craig Walsh's *Entwined* (2002), made from copper and a reclaimed sugar mill roller, is incorporated into Artspace Mackay's weathered steel façade, and the mosaic piece *The elemental labyrinth* (2002) by Jill Chism is part of the gallery entrance's green space. In 2008, high profile Queensland artist Fiona Foley was commissioned by Mackay Regional Council to create six art installations for the Bluewater Trail along Mackay's Pioneer River, all of which honour the first peoples and the Australian South Sea Islanders of the region. Donna Marcus's 2012 addition to the Bluewater Trail, *True North*, was commissioned by Lend Lease and MRC. It is constructed from marine buoys to make reference to the town's economic and cultural ties to the sea. The 2015-16 City Centre revitalisation project commissioned North Queensland artist Brian Robinson's *Urban blooms* and *Deco blooms* on Wood Street, alongside the prominent stainless steel *Cane fire* by The Niche Art and *Meeting place* by local artists Wanda Bennett and Tracey Johnson.



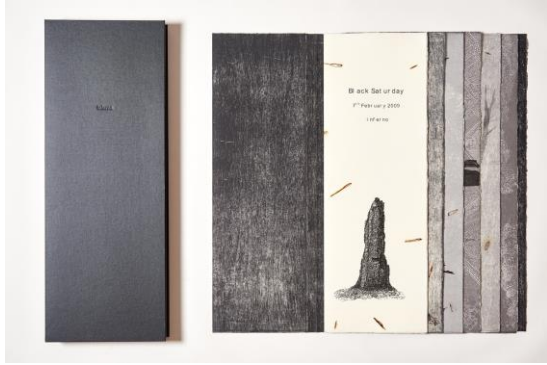
Acquisitive Exhibitions

Artspace Mackay's major touring exhibition of 2010-11, *Recycled Library: Altered Books*, was a touring exhibition featuring artist book highlights from the MRC Art Collection. It had over 42,000 visitors across 13 venues. The show featured recent acquisitions of work by Marion Borgelt, Alex Selenitsch, Yvonne Kendall, Archie Moore and Jánis Nedéla, as well as other significant Australian artists represented in the MRC Art Collection, Sebastian di Mauro, Judith Wright, Eugene Carchesio, Ti Parks, Patrick Pound and David Sequeira.

The development of Artspace Mackay's national touring exhibition *Violent Salt* (touring throughout Australia from 2019 to 2021) provided a timely opportunity to grow the collection's holdings of contemporary Indigenous art. Among the exhibition's works now in the collection are Karla Dickens's powerful artwork *Quartered*, which builds upon five other works by Dickens held in the collection;

and *Aggregate icon (RBW)* by Jemima Wyman, a Brisbane- and Los Angeles-based visual artist who grew up in West Mackay. The Wyman acquisition adds to a growing group of artworks now held in the Collection by contemporary Australian artists who once called the region home.

Artists' books are still, and will remain, the focus of the Mackay Regional Council Art Collection. The



biennial *Libris Awards: Australian Artists' Book Prize* (an open competition for makers of artists' books) continues to offer prize money and acquisitive incentives to Australia's best and emerging artists working in the field. With ongoing support from sponsors and the artists' book community, Artspace Mackay continues to source new acquisitions from the *Libris Awards*, ensuring the ongoing story of contemporary Australian artists' books is told through the MRC Art Collection.

Artspace Mackay, 2021

Images:

1. John GOULD (author) & Henry Constantine RICHTER (illustrator) *Onychogalea unguifer (nail-tailed kangaroo)* 1845-63, hand-coloured lithograph with gum wash, 36.7 x 54.5 cm. Mackay Regional Council Art Collection. Gift from Wilson & Company, Stock and Sharebrokers 1987.
2. Rosella NAMOK *Kaapay & Kuyan...old couple* 2005, etching on paper, 49 x 39 cm. Mackay Regional Council Art Collection. Gift of Geoff and Fran Barker through the Cultural Gifts Program 2006.
3. Fiona FOLEY *Mangrove cap* 2009, weathered steel, solar-powered LED lights, 9 x 9.5 m. Mackay Regional Council Art Collection, purchased 2009.
4. Dianne FOGWELL *Inferno* 2020, linocut, woodcut, and burnt drawings, 82 x 31 x 5.5 cm (closed). Mackay Regional Council Art Collection. Winner, Dalrymple Bay Coal Terminal National Artists' Book Award, Libris Awards 2020.