

Quality on show at Inkmasters Print Exhibition 2018

Review by Andrea Huelin

August 2018

[see images below in order mentioned]

Exhibition openings are social affairs, and I shamefully admit to enjoying some industry gossip and a glass of bubbles on opening night, often at the expense of spending time viewing the actual art. This was definitely not the case for the recent Inkmasters Print Exhibition at the Tanks Art Centre in Cairns. Upon entering the space, there was no denying the outstanding overall quality of this exhibition and it was thrilling to explore the variety of work on show. The socialising would have to wait – this art deserved our immediate attention.

Quality can be a hard term to define, but it was certainly there in abundance, courtesy of more than 150 finalists in this fourth exhibition by Inkmasters Cairns, which was established in 2011 to consolidate the tropical city as a regional and global centre of printmaking excellence. These were artists who took their time to get things right, and the dedication to their medium was apparent in complex and multi-layered works of art, which gave the viewer so much to behold, consider and admire. Even the works that were not as process-intensive as others had a light but determined deliberateness, which created a special kind of magic when combined with the element of chance that printing processes bring. My enthusiasm for the excellence on show was echoed again and again as I chatted with others in the gallery, who agreed that this might be Inkmasters' best exhibition yet.

There were many levels on which the works could be enjoyed, and it made the experience of visiting the exhibition a long and rewarding one. The first visit was to enjoy the works by the impact of the imagery alone. On the second visit the smaller works had their moment in the sun and there was a delicious sense of discovery in appreciating their details. One last look highlighted the pure mastery of the printmakers and some precious, previously undiscovered gems.

This year's artist in residence *Gary Shinfield* responded to his Cairns experience by producing a multi-panel unique state linoprint that seemed to reflect the darkness, density and drama of the tropical rainforest. Bold reds were layered with gold and black on multiple sheets of Thai hand-made paper, built up in heavy layers so that the paper took on a sculptural aspect, hanging unframed against the white wall.

Other artists also responded to the environment and landscape in their works, showing the virtuosity of printmaking in translating and interpreting the essence of a subject. *Helen Clarke's* reduction linocuts, hung near the entrance to the exhibition, brought the bold oxide reds and deep purple shadows of the Gascoyne region of Western Australia into sharp contrast against the vivid greens of the garden surroundings of the Tanks Arts Centre, reminding us of the far-flung origins of many of the artworks in the exhibition.

Danielle Creenaune's award winning Mokulito print *The Source* showed a path through a stream – its simplicity belying a skilful and heartfelt drawing of a place of great meaning to the artist. Printed to the edges of the paper, and hung unframed in three sheets, the piece has a quiet but potent effect. In contrast, *Christine Druitt-Preston's* linocut print 'My place' described in detail an interior scene from her home, exuding warmth and fondness, and displaying the artist's skill in controlling tone in this relief medium. On the subject of skill, *Rew Hanks'* breathtaking hand coloured linocut of the black volcanic landscape of Iceland is a testament to the power and impact of the medium at its absolute best.

Australian printmaker *Clare Jackson* won the Early Career Printmaker's Award for her beautifully conceived and executed etching 'I saw it different, I must admit', where an aerial view of the landscape is also a record of a moment in time. In her small but arresting print, a parachute lands and sends up a puff of dust, which casts a shadow on the bare brown earth. The parachutist is not visible, and the way the light catches the edges of the crumpling parachute gives it a curiously organic ambiguity.

As usual in a printmaking exhibition, part of the delight in its viewing was in the textural pleasure of paper and the surprise of other surfaces, which some artists have exploited to great effect. *Penny Hudson's* 'A stitch in time' artist book had tiny prints of delicately sewn garments sewn onto the creamy paper of a concertina style artist book, while

tiny lacy dresses hung in acrylic and ashwood boxes alongside, bringing to mind the care and attention taken to produce garments in the old days.

Hannah Parker's award-winning screen print 'Through squid eyes' had a delicacy of its own, portraying brightly coloured squid among layered imagery from the sea and air floating on 8 metres of translucent fabric hung from the very high ceilings of the Tanks Arts Centre. Parker has captured the underwater movement of the squid delightfully and with humour, transporting the viewer to joyous night dive on the neighbouring Great Barrier Reef.

Cairns artist *Laurel McKenzie* has presented an unlikely shop-like display of actual shoes and bags in her 'Accoutrements ii', which looked marvellous, and almost had you singing out for a size 9, before looking closely and noticing that they were a cleverly conceived critique on traditions of gendered imagery. The commodities, complete with pretty bows, had been crafted from representations of women's naked skin printed on polyester satin and card, creating the unsettling sense that the shoes and bags were made from women's skin itself.

Noticeable in this year's exhibition were the number of artworks that were printed to the edges of the paper, and hung unframed in a series on the wall, bringing out the contemporary and experimental nature of many of the works.

Among them was 'Offsetting' by *Glenda Orr*, the winner of the Dr Raya Mayo Prize for excellence in printmaking. The artwork comprised 6 panels depicting a slightly distorted view of a number of stacked axes, a highly original comment on the perceived 'death by small cuts' of Australia's habitats and biodiversity. The scratches, fractures and chips in the axes were conveyed with subtle mastery by spit bite aquatint and the layered impressions in black, red and grey captured the worn texture of a well-used tool. The design, colour palette and surfaces in this evocative work invited different readings. Lined up as they were, the axe handles were also an unsettling line up of human fragments – broken teeth or bones – also conveying the artwork's implied violence.

Other prints were quiet observations, or gentle studies in colour and form. *Roslyn Kean* and *Lauren Carter* explored composition and colour in their works to great effect, and *Anna Curtis* skilfully observed the order in nature in her reduction linoprint, 'The Flowering'. *Damon Kowarsky's* intricate and restrained etching and silkscreen 'Cite de Dinan' explored the subtle shifts in tone that can be achieved through combined media.

Many artists explored more traditional printmaking genres, such as botanical studies and maps. *Robyn Mayo's* images were drawn in the field with great attention to describing the form of the hardy desert plants of Ruby Gap, Northern Territory. Visiting butterflies were left uncoloured while the greens and yellows of the foliage were hand-coloured as the heroes of the story. Rounding out this story in elegant script along the bottom of the print were the medicinal and practical uses of the plants, as well as personal reflections on their qualities, creating a precious and potentially historical record. *Robert Pau's* 'Torres Strait Conflict Map' linocut documented the contact foreign vessels had with Torres Strait Islanders from the 1600s to the early 1900s in a map of the islands, showing the paths of the journeys, peppered with nautical and cartographical symbols bordered by Torres Strait symbols and totems.

Exciting to see were the artists who explored new processes and contemporary imagery in their printmaking practice. *Margaret Genever* reimagined the historical tradition of renaming the constellations to reflect modern concerns in her playful digital print 'Orion the Hunters', where nude, heavily armed characters pursue the perfect selfie. *Kamil Zaleski* from Poland explored the world of fake physical activity in computer games in a digital print that vibrated with a 3D stereoscopic effect.

Printmaking has a strong tradition in story telling, particularly in indigenous art, and many works in the exhibition presented engaging narratives. *Rosie Lowdown's* etching depicted the story of her great grandfather evading trackers who would remove him from his land by climbing a tree and staying perfectly still, even though he was being attacked by biting green ants. *Daniel O'Shane* won the Indigenous Printmakers Prize with a vinylcut depicting the story of the mythical origins of a rock formation on Erub (Darnley Island in the Torres Strait), where a man laments the loss of his beloved pet pelican.

My only regret with the Inkmasters exhibition in 2018 is that it couldn't have been on show for longer than its three weeks, as it was a most eloquent illustration of the vibrancy of contemporary printmaking. As usual, it was the impressive culmination of a biennial program of events and a survey of the printmaking practices of artists from all

corners of the globe (including Australia, Germany, India, Poland, South Africa, Sweden, Hong Kong and Thailand), and the organising team deserve energetic applause. The quality of the show reinforced the important role that printmaking has in observing, interpreting and translating the world around us and in inventing new ways to communicate contemporary concerns. It is reassuring to know that these age-old print media are in the hands of the most inventive, careful and thoughtful people in our artistic community.



Helen Clarke, 'Burringah Gasgoyne', reduction linocut, 50x70, 2017



lithography)

Danielle Creenaune, 'The Source' (tryptich), Mokulito (wood



Christine Druitt-Preston, 'My place', linocut, 70x126,

2018



Clare Jackson, 'I saw it different, I must admit', 2 plate etching, aquatint,

49x38.5, 2017



Penny Hudson, 'A stitch in time', artist book of etchings, stitchings, ash wood, acrylic,

20x40, 2017-18



Hannah Parker, 'Through squid eyes', screen print on fabric, 800x115, 2018



Laurel McKenzie, 'Accoutrements ii', archival pigment printed polyester satin, card,

55x45x45, 2017



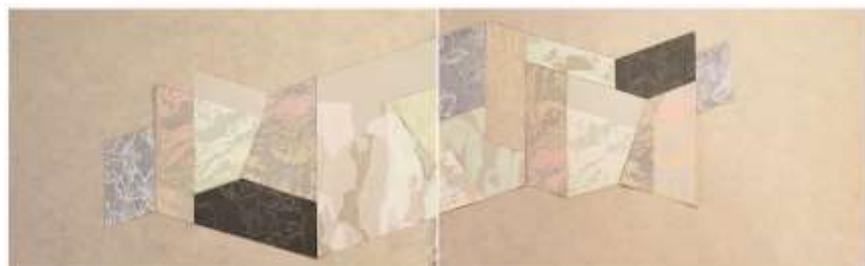
Glenda Orr, 'Offsetting' (6 panels), etching, aquatint, spit-bite,

118x132



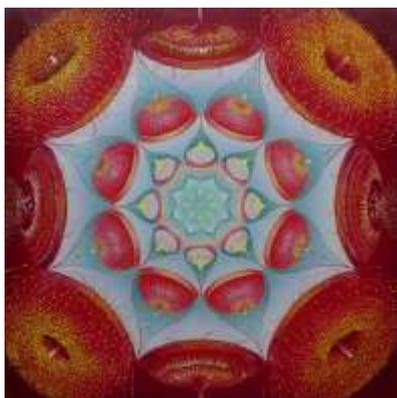
Roslyn Kean, 'Edges series, Venice', multi-block woodblock, hand printed (35

blocks), 95x101, 2018

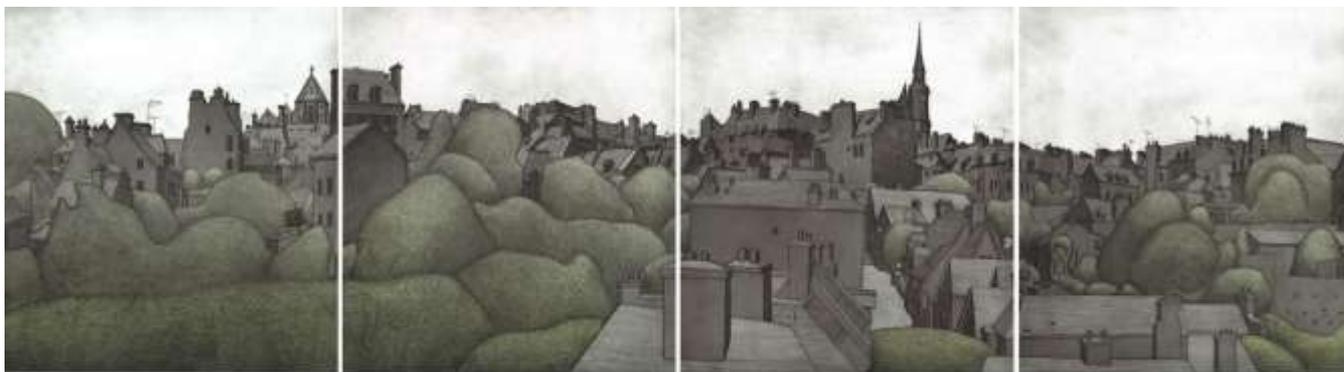


Lauren Carter, 'Almost' (detail), linocut collage,

43x104, 2018



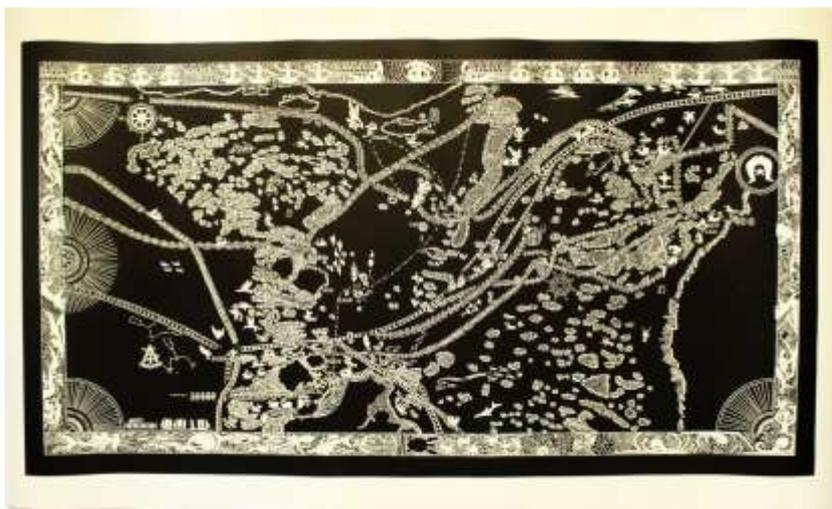
Anna, Curtis, 'The flowering', reduction linoprint, 60x60, 2016



Damon Kowarsky, 'Cite de Dinan', etching, aquatint, silkscreen, 60x160, 2017



Robyn Mayo, 'A basket from Peppimenarti holding plants from Ruby Gap, Northern Territory', hand coloured etching, 68x110, 2017

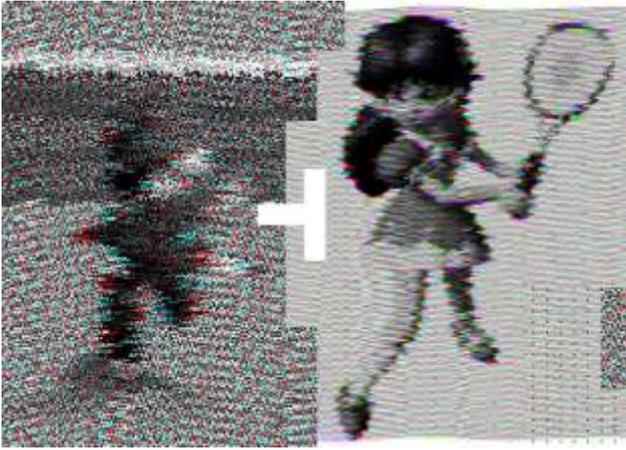


70x100, 2017

Robert Pau, 'Torres Strait Conflict Map', linocut,



Margaret Genever, 'Orion the Hunters', digital print, 110x90, 2018



Kamil Zaleski, 'Cwiczenia', digital print, 140x100, 2018



Rosie Lowdown, 'Kaplan wini Kaputpeh: hiding (from trackers), being bitten by ants', sugar lift, etching, 76x56, 2018



Daniel O'Shane, 'ii ra mere ne Gawei (the sound of tears and Gawei)', vinylcut, 220x120, 2016