

Recent Acquisitions 2009

11 September - 4 October at the Eltham Library Community Gallery,
Panther Place Eltham

Curator- Delsha Rees, Nillumbik Shire Council (contact details below)

Recent Acquisitions 2009 features the Shire of Nillumbik's significant contemporary and heritage works acquired over the past three years. We are delighted to present our ceramics collection in partnership with Ceramics Victoria as they celebrate their 40th anniversary with a program spanning 10 regional Victorian galleries, dedicated to the contribution made by artists working with clay.

The Nillumbik Art Collection began its history in the former Shire of Eltham as a result of a community need to support the visual arts. Prior to 1985 works were purchased by a variety of means and were predominantly created by artists who lived or worked locally. The district is well known for its artist's colonies and has long been attractive to artists who respond to and enjoy the natural environment and artistic community. Consequently, the arts and the environment are inextricably linked, and many of the works reflect these interests and concerns. Members of the arts community have been crucial in assisting with the programmes associated with promoting the visual arts and acquisition of works in the collection.

The ceramics collection 'push' was started in earnest from 2004 onwards when Arts Acquisition Committee members considered Nillumbik has a rich ceramic heritage which ought to be reflected in the collection. In fulfilling collection goals to acquire works of historical significance, the committee set about actively seeking works by pioneering potters.

Nillumbik has been fortunate to acquire pieces from Arthur and Sylvia Halpern's estates, a substantial collection from Elsa Ardern's estate and some exquisite pieces from Phyl Dunn's and Gus McLaren's estates in the last couple of years.

In 1950, Arthur and Sylvia Halpern established a workshop and were able to employ a small team of workers to make production wares under the name of SYLHA. These wares were sold at George's department store and also Miss MacMillan's Primrose Pottery Shop in Melbourne. Sylvia's stoneware vessel, a large curved egg-shape, is a handsome example of her work from the 1970s. The pot's generous proportion and highly textured surface has been decorated with thrown and dribbled glazes, leaving dramatic streaks of metallic black.

In 1958 Phyl Dunn and Reg Preston, together with Arthur Halpern, Gus McLaren and Charles Wilton established the Potters Cottage in Warrandyte. Its intention as a cooperative was to make and sell handmade Australian pottery in an effort to enhance the quality of contemporary life. The original members were joined by Sylvia Halpern, Elsa Ardern, Kate Janeba in 1961 and Peter Laycock in 1968. A new location on Jumping Creek Road was purchased in 1961 and the cooperative proudly expanded their activities to the 1965 prize, a pottery school and restaurant. They led the way with the largest range of pottery on offer for sale in Australia.

Warrandyte potters Elsa Ardernd and Sylvia Halpern were close friends over many decades. They often collected clay, skied and walked together. Elsa joined the Potter's Cottage cooperative in 1961 and dug clay for her early earthenware pots in Kangaroo Ground. Later in her career Elsa worked primarily in stoneware since higher firing temperatures allowed her to develop and use glazes derived from local rocks and natural materials.

Nillumbik's artists carry on these traditions today, working independently or in artist's colonies such as Dunmoochin, Baldessin Press, Montsalvat or Laughing Waters Road. They are mostly inspired by the seductive natural elements of the Nillumbik region, investigating the intricate personalities of wind, wildlife, fire, trees, wood, rocks, fog, symbols and uncertain futures. Artists represented in the exhibition possess a concern and passion for the harsh reality of our environment and a strong environmental and conservation focus, they include Angela Brunton, Sue Ford, Penelope Aitken, Camilla Tadich, Charlie Sublet, Paul Barton, Tommaso Durante, and Cameron Robbins.

For more information contact:

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