

National Cultural Policy Submission

Chris Lawry

As an artist

I am a printmaker and it concerns me that this area of the visual art world is under represented in our national galleries. .

A prejudice in serious visual arts selection and exhibition policy against fine art prints and printmakers is of long standing, both in Australia and internationally. I search in vain in major galleries the world over for representations of my chosen art form. It astonishes me that photography is represented well everywhere, while printmakers are virtually ignored. When artists like Van Gogh and Gauguin and the Western art world discovered, and were greatly influenced by the Japanese printmakers. Japanese art collectors were astonished, and even a little offended. They considered the printmakers in the same light as calendar, or poster makers. It was art for the humble.

When Claude Flight, of London's Grosvenor school, discovered the fresh new potential of lino cut prints, both as a medium for exciting modernist art, and as art accessible to everyone (because they were cheaper than paintings) the art world frowned and forgot them as soon as possible. A lot of the artists were women anyway, who worked on their kitchen tables. Enough said.

As I write, I know I had better get down to Geelong to catch two of Australia's Grosvenor school graduates – Ethel Spowers and Evaline Syme, as for sure this show will never appear at the NGV. A few years ago I saw an amazing show of Renaissance Chiaroscuro prints at the Ballarat art gallery. Thank goodness, printmakers do appear in regional galleries from time to time.

These prints are truly amazing. It appears they were made mostly as copies of other artists paintings and sculptures. No doubt again, acquired by the humble. I don't think these artisans would have found a market for original work had they tried to step up to being acknowledged as artists in their own right.

Australia does have a fine and vigorous tradition of printmaking, both in the past, and today. I would like to acknowledge and thank Roger Butler of NGA for his PRINTED series.

Printmakers are represented in regional and commercial galleries. The National Galleries do collect and store the works of notable printmakers – and store them in drawers, rarely to be seen. I was amazed, when Melbourne had a Hokusai show, to discover we had a copy of 'The Great Wave Off Kanagawa'. I had to go to Japan to see that.

To me, the accessibility (by price) of artists traditional prints is one of the best things about them. We should celebrate wonderful art that can be within the reach of art lovers of moderate means, not prejudiced against them. I myself have a collection of some wonderful prints by artists like Ron McBurnie, Rew Hanks, David Frazer, Kasia Fabijanska plus, wonderful Ukrainian artist Olesya Dzhurayeva, French artist Marie Boralevi and others, included a somewhat battered Hiroshige.

It would help current working artist, as well as inspire and uplift me personally, if our major galleries took a different, fresher, look at printmakers,

Thanks

Chris Lawry
PRINTMAKER