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Mrs J.G. Schumann
State President
South Australian Country Women's Association
30 Dequetteville Terrace
Kent Town SA 5067

3 September 2001

Dear Mrs Schumann,

I am writing to congratulate you on *Home Is Where the Heart Is*. Although I have not yet seen the exhibition, Vivonne Thwaites sent me a catalogue, which I have read with great interest and appreciation. As well as discovering that the SACWA has such a valuable and exciting historic collection, I was particularly impressed by the mixture of contemporary and historic works made by such a broad range of artists. I agree with Vivonne and Mary Eagle when they point out how important it has become for contemporary artists, especially women, to make historic links to traditional arts and crafts like those produced by the SACWA. This clever selection is not only perfectly complementary, but propinquity of old and new also makes both look more novel and beautiful.

For many years I too have been mixing historic and contemporary, past and present art works in similar ways. Two books I edited on Australian women's art, *Heritage, the National Women's Art Book: 500 works by 500 Australian women to 1955* (Fine Arts Press, Sydney, 1995) and (with Jo Holder) *Past Present: The National Women's Art Anthology* (Craftsman House, Sydney, 1999), aimed to show that our art history is more socially relevant and broader based than the old story of painters and a few sculptors (mostly men) still told in most of our art galleries. I too included weaving and other fibre works by old and new, indigenous and non-indigenous women, paintings and embroideries for home and show, and so on. I'd like to think my books and the 1995 National Women's Art Exhibition we organised concurrently – held in about 150 galleries throughout Australia – made both institutions and visitors more aware of the importance of art done outside its borders; but I'm afraid any conversions were partial and mostly short-lived.

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Your exhibition is another step on the road to integration, not just of the arts and crafts of past and present, black and white, amateur and professional, but also of the useful and decorative arts of both town and country. Such integration undoubtedly benefits contemporary artists, but it works both ways. As a trustee of the Historic Houses Trust of NSW in 1993-99, I was involved in several projects that involved showing contemporary art in historic properties, especially Elizabeth Bay House, the 1830s home of the NSW Colonial Treasurer and natural history collector Alexander Macleay and his family, and John Macarthur's Elizabeth Farm. Not every visitor enjoyed seeing contemporary artworks mixed up with the (recreated) historic contents of these houses, yet most agreed that modern artists' interpretations of aspects of the place and its collections illuminated the past in quite new and unexpected ways. It also did a lot for visitor numbers.

In your exhibition, the diverse uses made of materials are especially striking. It is illuminating to compare traditional works in, say, wool or fibre with a contemporary artist's use of the same material, particularly when the latter incorporates knowledge of and respect for her medium's history. Rag rugs, basket weaving, knitting, embroidery and 'making do' have all been taken far too much for granted in the past, even by their creators. Exhibitions like this give them proper national prominence and status.

I hope other bodies with equally significant collections follow your example – not just other CWAs but also places like the Embroiderers' Guild. I'd certainly love to see the rest of your collection when I am in Adelaide in December and wonder how easy it is to access. Is it open to the public? Is there a catalogue – published, online or otherwise accessible to an eastern stater? I found the Bicentennial-funded National Craft Register for South Australia most useful when I was working on *Heritage* – the best of all the state registers. Exhibitions and publications that display and/or catalogue collections in full are just as crucial as professionally curated art exhibitions, of course, even though they tend to be considered of local or specialist interest only and rarely capture the public (or the media's) imagination.

That's another reason why we need exhibitions like *Home Is Where the Heart Is* with its far grander aims. The advantages of making little-known collections relevant and appealing to a national art public must outweigh the disadvantages of having to be highly selective. Oddly enough, I'm coming to Adelaide to give a conference paper on Centenary of Federation Funding for the visual arts, which I think has generally been a failure – with rare exceptions. Your exhibition appears to be one, though I'd love to know exactly how much you received for it. One splendid Sydney exhibition was rejected twice for funding but still had to include the logo on its catalogue in order to get publicity. I hope you did better than that.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Joan Kerr