



# 用心作画 - 澳洲画家与中国

Writing a painting - to write from the heart

## Writing a Painting

Artists Helen Fuller and Robin Best with Huang Xiuqian of Jingdezhen, China and Nyukana Baker of Ernabella

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## Associated projects

*Out of Site*, Lounge Gallery, Fenn Place, exploring the cultural themes of *Writing a Painting* from historical perspectives. Curated by Melinda Rankin in association with Stephanie Radok, Annalise Rees and Qi Zhang, the works draw links between the significance of this geographical location for the Kurna people, traditional owners of the land, and the Chinese community based in this part of Adelaide during the late 1800s and early 1900s. Funded by Adelaide City Council and the Australia China Council.

*Presence*, Fenn Place, Year 11 Art students, Wilderness School - visual responses to the themes in *Writing a Painting* with black bamboo, paper pulp and red string.

*Little growths*, a Fenn Place collaborative temporary artwork by Maria Parmenter, Yhonnie Scarce, Mariska Thynne, Anne Weckert, Qi Zhang describing cultural links in a variety of medium. Project funded by the Helpmann Academy.

*in this skin*, Fenn Place projection, collaborative project by Emma-Jane Byles and Michelle Pearce exploring the similarities and differences between cultures represented on the City West campus.

The Architecture Museum, Kurna Building 2-21, items of historical interest. Edition of 1,500.

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South Australian School of Art Gallery  
University of South Australia  
Fenn Place, Adelaide

# Writing a Painting

## March 2006

Artists **Helen Fuller** and **Robin Best**  
with **Huang Xiuqian** of Jingdezhen, China  
and **Nyukana Baker** of Ernabella

Curator Vivonne Thwaites

Writers Mary Eagle, Nicholas Jose  
and John Kean

# Prefaces

## The South Australian School of Art

The South Australian School of Art is pleased to present our first Adelaide Festival exhibition *Writing a Painting* curated by Vivonne Thwaites for the School of Art Gallery at City West. The exhibition in the Kurna building and ancillary events staged in venues along Fenn Place embrace Chinese and Indigenous Australian cultures, and can be read as a formal gesture demonstrating the University of South Australia's commitment to cultural diversity, mutual understanding and reconciliation.

Increasingly, Indigenous Australian and international students studying at the University of South Australia bring their own cultural perspectives and traditions with them, enriching the educational experience of their fellow students and the social and cultural life of Adelaide.



Computer-generated image  
Kurna Building, University of SA  
Wardle+HASSELL Architects

Two of the School's outstanding graduates, Helen Fuller and Robin Best, show new works in the exhibition alongside works created by Robin Best with Nyukana Baker of Ernabella and Huang Xiuqian of Jingdezhen, China. This exhibition begins a discussion about the interrelationships between cultures in Australia that we hope to continue in future projects.

It is particularly fitting that this exhibition is held in the Kurna building at City West as Indigenous, Chinese and European histories intersect at this site. Prior to invasion by the British in 1836 this area was part of the country of the Kurna people, acknowledged in the naming of the Kurna building.

During the mid-1800s it became the China Town of Adelaide. Now it houses the City West campus of the University of South Australia, particularly the Schools of Art and Architecture located in distinctive new buildings designed by John Wardle Architects in association with HASSELL, Australia.

This exhibition and ancillary events remind us of our rich and complex cultural history while at the same time they celebrate the diverse cultural traditions underpinning the work in the 2006 Adelaide Festival exhibition *Writing a Painting*. ■

**Professor Kay Lawrence AM**  
Head, South Australian School of Art  
University of South Australia

## UniSA International

UniSA International is delighted with the opportunity to support the Adelaide Bank Festival of Arts 2006 project – *Writing a Painting*.

Integral to the success of our international programs is our understanding of how different cultures connect. *Writing a Painting* provides for a continuing dialogue between cultures and recognises where the histories of Indigenous Australians and Chinese people intersect.

Both South Australian artists in this project, Helen Fuller and Robin Best have lived and worked in China. Robin's collaborator, Huang Xiuqian is a highly regarded artist from Jingdezhen, an area with a 2,000 year old tradition of porcelain work. We see in this exhibition some of the unique outcomes of Robin's engagement with an artist of Central Australia, Nyukana Baker, combined with her experience in China. Helen Fuller's works show responses to Chinese traditions in her brushwork, colours and forms.

As a unit of the University of South Australia, UniSA International supports and implements the strategic direction for international activities set by the University's Senior Management Group and Council. A key role of the unit is to support the embedding of an international and intercultural perspective in University activities and to support the University's international business development strategy.

UniSA has relationships with 33 educational institutions in China. Activity within these relationships ranges from student and staff exchange to teaching and research. Through projects like *Writing a Painting* and through our range of international activity we look forward to a future of successful and mutually rewarding relationships with our Chinese partners. ■

### Rob Greig

Director, UniSA International  
University of South Australia

## The Indigenous College of Education and Research

The Indigenous College of Education and Research (ICER), an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education program in Australia, dates back to 1973. ICER is an integral part of the University of South Australia enabling it to facilitate its legislative commitment to Indigenous Education. The ICER is a component of the Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences and comprises four major areas: the Office of the Dean, The Unaipon School, the Indigenous Support Unit (ISU) and 'Nunga' Research. The Unaipon School was launched by Professor David Robinson and Mr. Harold Kropinyeri on Friday 6th September 1996 and was formally moved to the City West Campus in January 1997. The programs offered by the School have assisted the University to meet the commitment made by the University in its Statement of Reconciliation.

Pitjanjatjara/Yankunytjatjara from the north west of South Australia also play a central role in the life of the University. Pitjantjatjara was the first Australian Indigenous language to be taught in a tertiary institution and has been taught continuously in this institution since the 1960s.

By the end of 2005 there will be over 1,000 Indigenous graduates.

ICER is pleased to be associated with *Writing a Painting*, a project that gives focus to Indigenous culture on and around the site of the City West Campus of the University of SA. ■

### Professor Paul Hughes

Dean, Indigenous College of Education and Research  
University of South Australia

Mullawirraburka Elder 'dry forest'  
Kadlitpinna father of Kadli, 'dingo'  
Ityamaitpinna father of Ityamaii  
Wirraitpinna father of Wirra, 'forest'  
Mulleakiburka Elder, 'dry, deep'  
Kalyoburka Elder of Kalyo, 'a myrtaceous shrub'  
Karkulyaburka Elder of Karkulyua  
Tindoburka Elder of Tindo, 'sun'  
Wauwitpinna father of Wauwe, 'female grey kangaroo'  
Munaitya Wattiwattitpinna fifth born, male, 'native cherry'  
Tilti Midlaitya  
Pangki Pangki Kaurna tracker  
Tuitpurru  
Kudnaipiti  
Mogata one of Mullawirraburka's wives  
Wauwe Kadlitpinna's wife  
Kudnarto third born, female  
Mary Munato fourth born female

# Writing a Painting writing from the heart

Vivonne Thwaites

Itya Maii 'flesh food'  
Wailtyi 'spirit of kangaroo'  
Kauwe Wingko 'water breath'  
Pitpauwe 'honeysuckle'  
Tanggaira 'spirit of fungus'  
Wirra 'forest, bush'  
Tainmunda 'mistletoe'  
Tudno 'species of snake'  
Paitya 'reptile, venomous'  
Nanto Munaitya fourth born  
Nanto 'male grey kangaroo' Kartammeru first born  
Kalloongoo  
Sally  
Harry  
Emue

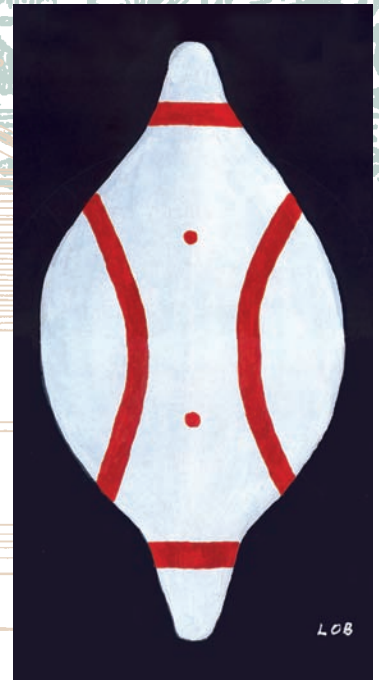
Ah Sing cabinetmaker  
 Hee Kee importer  
 Tin Hap wholesale fruiterer & importer  
 Quong Shing Way importer  
 Ah Dun fancy goods  
 Ah Gooley fancy goods  
 Lun Yick fancy goods importer  
 Lun Harp wholesale fruiterer  
 Hong Yuen fancy goods importer  
 Quong On fancy goods  
 Sin You cabinetmaker  
 Wee Tung cabinetmaker  
 Quong Kee hawker  
 Ah Fong cabinetmaker  
 Ah Fong hawker  
 Hoong Lee cabinetmaker  
 Li Chon Pang physician and herbalist  
 Hong Tai fancy goods  
 Kwong Yuen grocer  
 Quong, Wing & Co drapers  
 Ah Dunn hawker  
 Kwong Lee Goon importer  
 Wing Young cabinetmaker  
 Ah Loy cabinetmaker  
 Lo Chung hawker  
 Lee Wood cabinetmaker  
 Kai Kee specialist  
 Ah Gay cabinetmaker  
 Lim, Geo & Co cabinetmakers  
 On Lee specialist  
 Wing Ginn laundry  
 Woon Wah cabinetmaker  
 Yot Way draper  
 Hop Lee cook  
 Doy Lee & Co general store

Australia and China lay side by side for 300 million years. They drifted apart for millions more, and now, so geologists believe, they are moving back towards one another at a rate of a few centimeters a year.<sup>1</sup>

*...histories that are to be relevant for the future ought to pin themselves on the crossroads of culture contact, on the threads that link populations rather than retrace, affirm and reinvent boundaries between them.<sup>2</sup>*

Great Chinese fleets cruised close to Australia on their way to the coast of Africa in the fifteenth century, and Japanese traded in Southeast Asian waters in the sixteenth century.

Sailors may actually have landed. Aborigines spoke of contacts with pale-skinned people they called Bailini who, it is speculated, may have been Chinese.<sup>3</sup>



Lewis Warrilya Yerloburka O'Brien, *Koumo shield*, 2005, acrylic on board, 2005

LOB



W.A. Cawthorne 1824-1897  
Shields and spears of the natives on  
the battlefield, 1844. *Litcrorum*  
diarium 1842-44, Mitchell library,  
State Library of NSW, ref A105, item  
17, p53 April 22, 1844.



William Anderson Cawthorne was born in London in 1824 and arrived in Adelaide with his family in May 1841, shortly after the colony was established in 1836. He took a keen interest in Aboriginal culture. Cawthorne kept 26 volumes of diaries and journals between 1842 and 1859. Cawthorne was probably the first European to record Indigenous personal names in South Australia.

This exhibition places on display for reflection, dialogue and celebration the art of two graduates of the South Australian School of Art, works on paper by Helen Fuller and porcelain works by Robin Best made in association with renowned artists, Nyukana Baker of Ernabella and Huang Xiuqian of Jingdezhen, China.

Both Helen's and Robin's art practices have been marked by time spent in China and the exploration of Chinese traditions. Each has also explored Australian Indigenous art and culture, Robin through her work with ceramics in Aboriginal communities.

Robin's collaborator Nyukana Baker was born at Ernabella on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands in 1943 and has sustained a forty-eight year art practice from the craft room at Ernabella. Huang Xiuqian, a second collaborator with Robin Best, was born in 1939 in Yongxiu Country, Jiangxi Province, China. He has developed new porcelain painting techniques and created many official works for the Chinese Government.

Both the works in porcelain and on paper in this exhibition generate conversations and celebrate cultural connections between non-Indigenous, Indigenous and Chinese Australians.

The University of South Australia recognises the Indigenous history associated with its current site at City West. In 1997 it was the first Australian University to adopt a Statement of Reconciliation. The University has many links with China through UniSA International and its exchange programs.



Rob Amery has noted that Piltawodli, 'possum home' in Kaurna, was chosen as the site of the 'Native Location' in April 1837 by Kaurna people themselves.<sup>4</sup> Piltawodli is highly significant to the study of the Kaurna language. Almost all its resources were recorded from Kaurna people who resided at or frequented Piltawodli by Europeans who lived there or were closely involved with the establishment.

**W.A. Cawthorne 1824-1897**

*Piltawodli School Room*

The Piltawodli (possum home) School Room (on the banks of the river opposite Unisa site) was opened 23 December 1839, closed and relocated to Kintore Ave 1845. *Literarium diarium* (1842-44), Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, ref A103, item 3, p254 September 15, 1843.

During the research phase of this project as I looked at issues linked to Robin's ceramics and Helen's paintings I learned that the location of the South Australian School of Art Gallery City West site was, in the mid to late 1880s, the old China Town of Adelaide. This was extraordinarily fortuitous as these buildings are also on a significant Kaurna site, hence the name of the Kaurna Building. Two lively nineteenth century William Cawthorne images illustrating particular incidents relating to Indigenous people around the site in the early days of settlement are reproduced here.

Architectural historian Chris Garnaut has provided research on the Joss House (Chinese Temple) that once was on Town Acre 55 bordered by Hindley St and Morphett St. Architect Steve Grieve recorded the building prior to its demolition in 1985. Furniture maker Khai Liew provided useful information on the Chinese furniture makers who once resided and worked around the City West area.

They are well-documented in K. Fahy, C.Simpson and A.Simpson, *Nineteenth Century Australian Furniture*, David Ell Press, 1985. Khai has made a piece of furniture as a tribute to these men. Curator-in-training Melinda Rankin located further references dating from the mid to late 1800s that referred to Indigenous and Chinese people living and working in this particular area of Adelaide.

Historically, China has offered Australian writers and artists a way of dealing with the apparent limitlessness of their own circumstances. In the 1930s and 40s the modernist painters Margaret Preston and Ian Fairweather both visited China and made artworks influenced by that country's visual traditions, literature and philosophies. An avowed nationalist, Preston believed that, through an engagement with the arts of China and Japan as well as Australian Indigenous culture, Australian art would develop its own style. Her work was a bridge between east and west. Ian Fairweather immersed himself in Chinese culture for many years. His paintings of the 1950s and 60s are only now receiving due recognition for their innovative synthesis of Chinese art, Cubism and Aboriginal visual culture. The sensitivity developed by paying attention to the visual art of different cultures necessarily involves a stimulating engagement with different world-views and languages.

In commenting on the work of Emily Kame Kngwarrey that represented Australia at the 1997 Venice Biennale, curator Hetti Perkins wrote: 'The stripe is mobile; moving forward and backward, up and down, spontaneous, forceful and gestural. It is a mark that is globally occurring, like a word in a language we can all understand.' The exhibition *Writing a Painting* celebrates the connections between writing and painting in diverse cultures. Indigenous drawing in the earth or marking the body, where symbolic patterns simultaneously indicate features of the landscape and ancestral paths, inextricably joins language and visual marks.

The *tangka* (liver) rather than the heart is the seat of the emotions in the Kaurna language. Thus the phrases *tangkarlo pintyandi*, *tangkarlo wirkandi*, *tangkarlo marnendi* (*pintyandi* 'creating', *wirkandi* 'brushing', *marnendi* 'applying grease' [to the body]) express the unity of hand and heart. These words demonstrate cross-cultural echoes by being viewed alongside the Chinese language translation which uses the same term *xie* for calligraphy and for drawing – thus describing an integration of body and spirit in an art that is traditionally an instrument of meditation to bring human consciousness into an awakened state of harmony with the universe. ■

Vivonne Thwaites  
October 2005



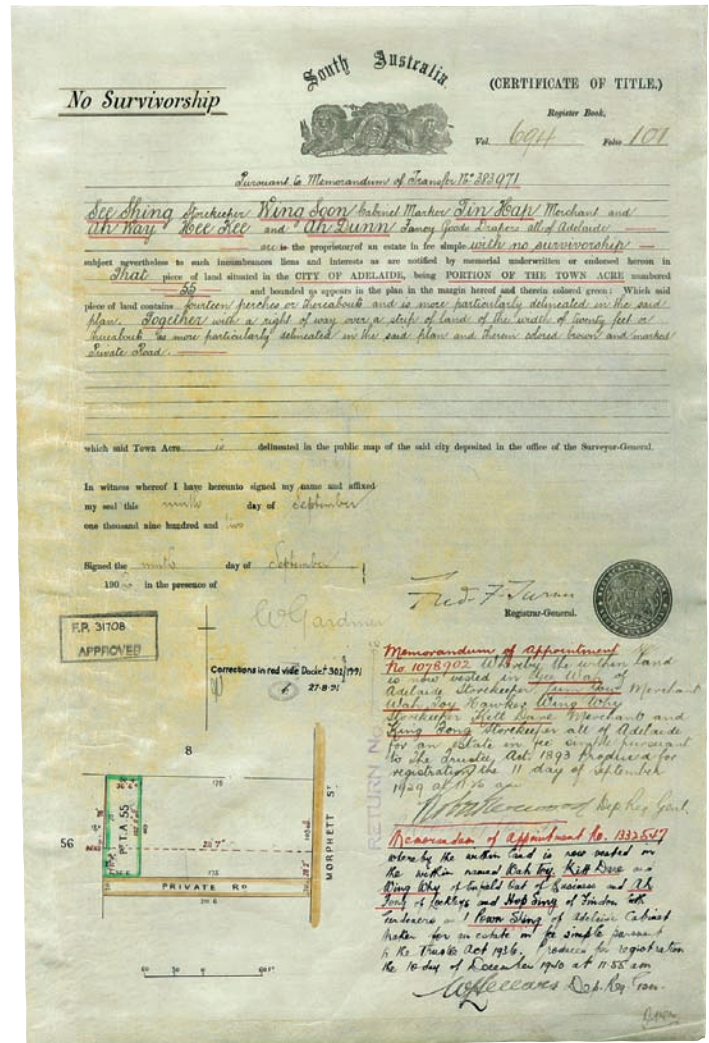
Deep. Go deep,  
as the long roots of myall  
mine the red country  
for water, for silence.

Silence is water  
all things are stirring,  
all things are flowering,  
rooted in silence.

Silence is empire.  
Tao is eternal.  
flowering, returning,  
with water, with silence.

Deep. Go deep  
as the blossoming myall.  
Silence is lifeblood;  
returning, flowering.

Randolph Stow  
Section XVI, From The  
Testament of Tourmaline,  
*Variations on Themes of  
the Tao Teh Ching*, 1966.



Joss House see caption page 11

Certificate of Title, 1902, Land  
Titles Office, Adelaide  
Vol. 694 Folio 101, Town Acre  
55, 1902, bordered by Morphett  
St and a private road backing  
onto Hindley St.

This Certificate of Title gives the names  
See Shing - Storekeeper, Wing Soon -  
Cabinet Maker, Tin Hap - Merchant and  
Ah Way, Hee Kee and Ah Dunn - Fancy Goods  
Drapers, all of Adelaide. In 1929, 1936  
and 1940 the titles were transferred to  
other groups of Chinese men.



Another addition to the religious buildings of Adelaide is a small josshouse which has recently been completed at the cost of members of the Chinese community on a vacant piece of ground near the northern end of Morphett-street...The exterior of the building is of galvanized iron and the interior of matchboard. A flight of steps lands the visitor on to a sort of verandah or wide portico facing northwards, with seats at either end...a large bowl in the centre filled with earth and joss-sticks. A doorway leads into the main part of the josshouse, a square room about 25ft, either way. The walls are of polished matchboard, and the ceiling is painted in blue and green At the south end is an altar, above which hangs a picture of a sedate and plump looking Chinese personage with oval eyes, long moustaches, and gorgeous robes, over whose shoulders two other Celestials are looking - one very dark and the other very fair...

Nobody offers public prayers in a josshouse - each man comes and burns his joss-sticks and puts up his own prayers. If his prayers are answered - say he is ill and gets well - he hangs a strip of cloth with Chinese characters on it to the wall as an acknowledgement. On this altar were pots of artificial flowers and fruit, joss-sticks, and blocks of sandalwood.... Just in front of the figures were a number of short sticks with something like a faded paper banner covered with dragons and other symbols fastened to each. The guide explained that these would enable a man to go freely anywhere, but whether they were celestial or terrestrial passports he could not explain. A brass lamp burns night and day in front of the pictures, and Chinese lanterns and other lamps hang from the ceiling. A gong, or rather a drum, covered with painted dragons and other signs, stands in one corner of the building near the door, and completes the furniture of the place... Saturday evening is to be kept as a high holiday by the Chinese of Adelaide, and crackers innumerable will be let off in the open space adjoining the Morphett Street josshouse.

A large consignment has just arrived from China, together with several ornaments for the temple which now presents an even more gaudy appearance than it did some weeks ago when first noticed in these columns...The subscription lists fixed on either side of the doorway show a healthy condition in the funds of the establishment. *The Advertiser*, Adelaide, Wednesday January 21, 1891, p4.



Although a China Town is in the 1990s located around the Central Market, the area that could have been designated as the first China Town was established from about 1881 on both sides of Hindley St and Morphett St and north of Light Square (roughly in the vicinity where the Living Arts Centre and Barron Town House are situated today.) By 1886, there were about 18 separate establishments where Chinese had shops or lived. In the early 1890s there was a Chinese temple in Morphett St, on town acre 55 fronting the north side of Hindley St and the West side of Morphett St.

Patricia Summerling, 'Adelaide's West End' in *William Shakespeare's Adelaide 1860-1930*, edited by Brian Dickey, Association of Professional Historians Inc., Adelaide, 1992, p32.



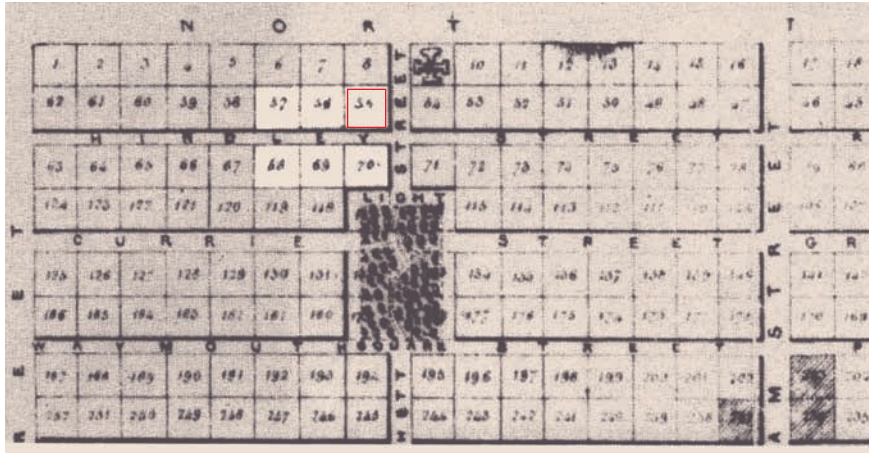
Image (right) Stephanie Radok, *Chinese Whispers*, 2005, acrylic on cardboard.

Joss House (Chinese Temple) Adelaide, (built circa mid 1880s; demolished 1985)

Photo Eric Algra 1985

The gutter profile indicates the structure was built in the mid 1880s. The internal timber framing held wooden linings that had been removed at the time of photography. It was clear the building had been heavily smoked in. The ceiling was carefully lined with timber.

Architectural report and drawing, Steve Grievé, 1985.



City West area with the old China Town of Adelaide circa 1880's, highlighted. Town acre 55 (in red) was the location of the Joss House pictured

A charismatic personality, Way Lee successfully bridged two cultures. He was naturalised in 1882, appointed as a mandarin of the fourth degree in 1887 and also became a Freemason. He hosted Chinese New Year dinners for Adelaide businessmen and provided fireworks on Guy Fawkes night for the wider community. *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, R M Gibbs, (ed.) Melbourne University Press, 1974.

Way Lee was considered the leader of the Chinese community and advocated strongly for the rights of Chinese immigrants, speaking out against discriminatory legislation. 'The Australian people are always very kind to me, but the law worse than the people.' *Adelaide Observer*, Feb 2, 1889, p33.

The Way Lee building on the City West campus of the University of South Australia commemorates this extraordinary man.



Trademark for products sold by Way Lee, a Chinese businessman who operated out of Adelaide's West End. The trademark was intended for use on matches, camphor, tea and other food. *Government gazette*, 6th May, 1897.

- <sup>1</sup> Eric Rolls, *Sojourners: Flowers and the Wide Sea*, University of Queensland Press, 1992, p2.
- <sup>2</sup> Regina Gantner, 'Mixed Relations, Toward Reconfiguring Australian History' in *Lost in the Whitewash, Aboriginal-Asian Encounters in Australia 1901-2001*, edited by Penny Edwards and Shen Yuanfang, Humanities Research Centre, ANU, 2003, p82.
- <sup>3</sup> Alison Brinowski, *The Yellow Lady: Australian Impressions of Asia*, Oxford University Press, 1992, p20.
- <sup>4</sup> Rob Amery, *Warrabarna Kaurna! Reclaiming an Australian Language*, Swets & Zeitlinger, The Netherlands, 2000, p56.

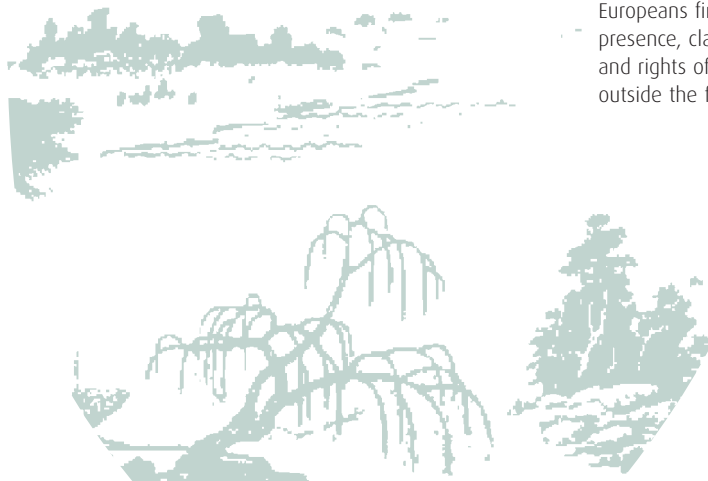
Tangkarlo pintyandi, tangkarlo wirkandi, tangkarlo marnendi  
用心作画 - 澳洲画家与中国  
Essays

# Citizens of the world

Nicholas Jose

Arriving in South Australia as a fourteen-year-old girl, not long after the colony's founding, Catherine Helen Spence sat on a log in Light Square and 'had a good cry'. She was overcome at discovering herself in such a remote outpost of civilisation. In the next couple of years, as her family started on its new life, young Katie read and re-read the few books that were available, including the works of Oliver Goldsmith, among which would have been his *Citizen of the World* (1762), a set of fictional letters written by an imaginary Chinese visitor to London. The Chinese is depicted as a citizen of the world, a wanderer, a philosopher interested in cultural differences and universal truths. His letters back home are a vehicle for the author's genial satire of eighteenth-century Britain. At the time China was imagined as a superior society guided by reason and virtue. Europeans, especially the English, who ruled over so much territory, were, in Goldsmith's eyes, far from the ideal citizens of the world.

The Spence family spent most of 1840, their first year in Australia, living in a marquee pitched on Brownhill Creek. A century later Brownhill Creek was a place where Kurna people still lived, maintaining their continuity with the locality. I wonder how young Katie Spence, who would grow up to become one of the most eloquent citizens of her new country, might have felt as she read Goldsmith's imaginary Chinese letters while encountering Aboriginal people on a daily basis. What kind of universal citizenship did she imagine encompassing herself, China and Aboriginal Australia? In a dozen or so years Chinese people would start arriving in South Australia, less as philosophers than to seek their fortune. They would mix with Aboriginal people in the area west of Adelaide's centre, around Fenn Place where the University of South Australia's Catherine Helen Spence Building now stands. Yet neither Indigenous people nor people of Chinese descent would be fully recognised as citizens of the newly forming society until late in the twentieth century. Citizenship of the world was available to Europeans first and foremost. The presence, claims, expression, stories and rights of others lay largely outside the frame.



Later generations are coming to understand that both Indigenous people and Chinese people have always, in different ways, been true citizens of the world in a special sense. Australian Aboriginal culture is of unequalled duration anywhere. Here it extends over endless country, sustaining successful co-habitation with the environment and resilient custodianship of lore and law. Chinese culture is also of long duration over a large geographical expanse, marked by the continuity of its written script. Today China embraces about one-fifth of the world's population, and the Chinese diaspora is global.

To those achievements the rest of the world turns in awe and admiration. For settler Australians there is the added awareness that, in any comparison, we can never claim such unbroken belonging and identity. What we can all do, though, is to share our various heritages as new cosmopolitans, turning the often violent demarcation lines of the past to creative opportunities for the present. That is what *Writing a Painting* is about.

The greater mobility of the last twenty years for Australians and Chinese alike, the innovation that has occurred in both Indigenous Australian and Chinese artistic traditions, and the contemporary energies of cross-cultural and transnational exchange have combined to create new kinds of artistic collaboration that re-imagine contested spaces and less comfortable interactions from the past. The historical contextualisation of *Writing a Painting* in relation to a mission school for Kurna children and a forgotten Chinese joss house, vanished buildings once not far from the City West campus where the contemporary work is now displayed, releases unsettled, unsettling spirits. The exhibition writes history, recovered through fugitive documents, around artworks that have their own subtle, non-verbal allusiveness.

Chinese artists arriving in Australia since the 1980s, when the borders on both sides became more open, have led the way in showing the possibilities of creative travel. The painter Shen Jiawei, for example, has shown how to adapt his style of romantic realism, learned in the Chinese academy, to a realist revision of Australian history that writes in his Chinese predecessors. He includes Quong Tart, Victor Chang and Mabel Lee with Ned Kelly, Mary McKillop and Cathy Freeman in panoramas of Australian life that he calls 'visible history'. Other artists have used the vantage point of Australia to re-assess Chinese traditional culture, putting its material forms to new uses, as in the case of Ah Xian, who moved from Beijing to Sydney in 1989 and has since worked at Jingdezhen, China's centuries-old imperial kiln site, home of blue and white porcelain, to produce the contemporary busts and figures, cast from life, of his *China, China* series.

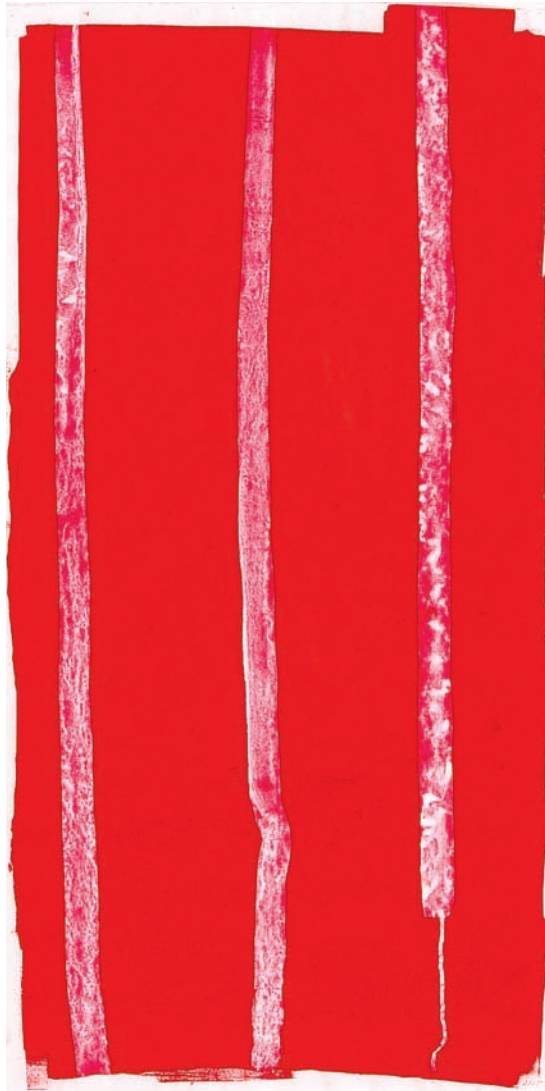
At the same time Australian Chinese artists have been encouraged to explore connections with the ancestral homeland from the perspective of their longer background here, often casting Australia in a new light. Photographer William Yang brings a visual aesthetic influenced by Chinese landscape, family and food to images of outback, kinship and bush tucker in Australia. Australian-born Barbi Lock Lee, who developed her practice as a potter at the Central Academy of Applied Arts, Beijing and at the traditional *yixing* kilns in Wuxi, applies new approaches to functional ceramic ware featuring Australian birds.

Gordon Hookey, an Indigenous artist from North Queensland with Waanyi affiliations, acknowledges Chinese forebears too. His art adapts customary elements such as the kangaroo to strong political comment, recently lampooning Indigenous and immigration policy in big bold works such as *Paranoia Annoy Ya* (2004) shown during the *Biennale of Sydney* at the MCA.

At the same time in an adjacent studio the Beijing-born artist Guan Wei was producing a large-scale work on related themes, *Feng Shui* (2004), also making play with Australian fauna. Such artists open up a creative zone for technical experiment, conceptual exploration and an oscillation of different traditions, reflecting the complexities of contemporary Australia in the process.

The movement of inspiration between Chinese, Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian artists and makers continues in *Writing a Painting* in the oblique dialogue between Huang Xiuqian, Nyukana Baker, Robin Best and Helen Fuller as they make crisscross journeys to diverse geographical, conceptual and tangible destinations. All are conscious of disappearing techniques and traditions, of the ephemerality and spontaneity of art, and of the resilience of transmission from one practitioner, one place and time, to another. Their works recognise dislocation and loss, even as they find beauty and celebration in the abstraction of context and the new forms of resonant expression they achieve.





Helen Fuller  
*Rag Trade No. 10, 2005*  
acrylic on Chinese paper  
99 x 50cm  
Photo Michal Kluwanek

Adelaide-based Robin Best takes her ceramic forms to Ernabella where senior Anangu Pitjantjatjara artist Nyukana Baker inscribes them with designs as fluid and personal as Chinese calligraphy. Then Best travels to Jingdezhen where the richly laden designs of traditional Chinese porcelain are applied by the master hand of Huang Xiuqian. Still other forms are left invitingly, meditatively blank. The vessels return, lightly bearing messages about the significance of ceramics within civilisation, extraordinary objects in their own right, speaking eloquently between themselves, and to us, of separateness and connection.

Helen Fuller travelled to China too from her Adelaide base, to Hangzhou and to Shanghai, that great city where the phoenix of the new is perpetually arising from the ashes of the old. Her delicate work of red and white on fragile rice paper reflects this cycle of reconfiguration, linking the grid of textile patterns with other grids, such as the vertical or horizontal scroll of Chinese writing and painting—ink and colour on paper—or the columns of black print on white in traditional books.

The grid evokes industrial processes too, and the rhythm and repetition of urbanisation, as demolition and rebuilding follow one upon another, with window and door frames salvaged from one place and put to new uses elsewhere. Gaps and irregularities suggest a broken lattice, a threadbare cloth, an incomplete re-invention, indicating the tough persistence that underlies survival.

Responding to the art of Robin Best and Helen Fuller in the presence of Nyukana Baker and Huang Xiuqian and in the environment of Fenn Place, with its Indigenous and Chinese contexts highlighted, the viewer experiences a new kind of cosmopolitanism. It requires curiosity, openness and patience, and the sensitivity to detail acquired through slow learning. This world is made in a triangulation of arcs of longevity, expanses of symbolic land and highly refined, well-honed skills. The citizenship that we take on becomes a personal possession that allows us to relate to our neighbours and our surroundings with new understanding. *Writing a Painting* shows how grace, spirit and poise can be the unexpected consequences as artists reach creatively across distance and division. Pots, paper, images and deeds—humble human things we can hold in our hands or follow with our eyes, transient passports to a bright new universe. ■

My origins are defined by seafaring. I come from a paternal line of merchant marines - men who laboured through an era when steam supplanted sail as the means by which goods were traded to Britain through the Suez Canal from the South China Sea. My ancestors, perhaps like yours, were vectors of colonisation.

Family history has it that my great grandfather was a ship's captain who died and was buried at sea, somewhere around the Ayeyarwady River, off what is now Myanmar. Earlier he had been involved in the Boxer Rebellion in China and through that encounter returned to the north of England with a precious porcelain tea set.

After two years at sea both he and the tea set were duly welcomed by the Kean womenfolk who waited in the grey streets of industrial Stockton-on-Tees.

The tea set was embellished with metallic dragons traversing an earthy red glaze, the cups fashioned of the finest porcelain. I have a distant memory of the feel of their edge on my lip, the saucers and teapot felt much sturdier in my freckled pink hand. To this day the set remains an item of contention and jealousy within my family.

For decades it has been stacked in a cabinet curated by my Irish-Australian mother (nee Keogh), much to the chagrin of my Scottish-English paternal aunts (nee Kean). Through their bloodline, they consider their claim on the tea set so much the stronger.

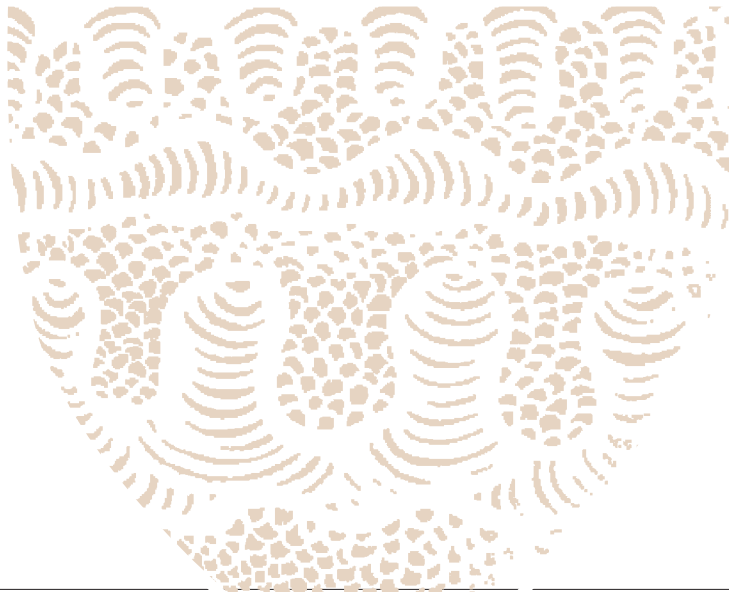
Like me, the artists in *Writing a Painting* have the urge to pick away at the threads of colonialism and go below the surface of our precarious existence, through the symbolic medium of objects. In the process they create new images that engage with the movement of visual culture through time and across hemispheres.

Before us, two very different artists open up complementary strands of colonial legacy - public history and private experience. Like a sea captain, Robin Best looks outward and over the horizon as she examines the tension between the centre and the periphery, commissioning far-flung artists from China and Central Australia to decorate components of her artworks. The vessels she assembles and her organising methodology mirror the process of colonialism itself. Objects are considered, classified and brought into order. Her ceramic forms are captured in an architecturally precise picture space. They are arranged to reflect the golden mean and as such are loaded with references to classical Greek thought.

Best reconstructs public history through an examination of craft techniques containing proscribed cultural significance and tangible economic value. Her choice of porcelain evokes the journey of the medium - from its ancient origins in China through appropriation by the British to its persistence in contemporary China. Similarly, *walka* (meaningful marks) originating from the poker-worked surfaces of wooden artefacts made for the tourist industry in Central Australia provide a more hotly-contested element of her lexicon of crafted exchange. These artefacts are called *punuku walka*<sup>1</sup> by Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara artists.

# Red Dragons and White Lines

John Kean





**Robin Best**  
*Settlement* (seven elements), 2005  
 cast coloured porcelain with underglaze black  
*punuku walka* by Nyukana Baker of Ernabella  
 Dimensions variable  
 Photo Grant Handcock

Helen Fuller, while equally literate in the language of line and form, focuses on private experience. She feels her way through the fabric of daily life, and her paintings reflect residual patterns of age and wear. The patched and battered surfaces of her works reference the make-do culture of preserved and recycled functionality, the underside of the rag trade, a place in which beauty must be sought in the essential qualities of humble materials.

Fuller too has lived and worked in China, but unlike Best, who inhabits the workshops of master ceramicists, she responds artistically to the textures and patterns of daily life.

She finds comfort in ragged edges of washing hung to dry above the street in Hangzhou – experiencing the familiarity of fabric in an unfamiliar culture. Paintings in the *Rag Trade* series re-examine these sensations, emphasising the wear of hard work and the effect of gravity on fibre. Fuller’s image of China is based on empathy, from her imaginings of the domestic and the fabrics used to wash, cover and wipe.

Both Fuller and Best provide clear iconographic references through which to read their works as text, but alternate meanings are encrypted within each of their contributions. In addition to Best as commissioning artist, we must consider the visual languages of those she engages to inscribe her vessels.

Ceramicist Huang Xiuqian and accomplished fabric artist Nyukana Baker provide the iconographic poles around which Best navigates. Xiuqian and Baker speak in the languages of their own cultures.

Xiuqian’s imperial dragons sweep across the sky, incendiary but benevolent, wise and lucky. The form of each brushstroke is proscribed and practiced, carrying meaning and bestowing on the possessor of the vessel some of the esteemed characteristics embodied by the Dragon.

Baker has selected just one of the visual languages available through Pitjantjatjara culture. She is most famous as a batik artist, who in her twenties travelled to Yogyakarta to learn from the masters. Since that time she has applied secular abstract *Ernabella designs* to silk and a host of other mediums. Her choice of *punuku walka* for application to Best’s vessels is unusual.

These designs are characteristically burnt with hot wire onto the surface of carved animals and bowls. While this decorative style evolved in manufacture for the tourist industry, the marks are not superficial.

These are the patterns of the earth - controlled and repetitive - rising and falling like the cadenzas of desert ceremony. Unlike Xiuqian's images of mercurial sky-born dragons making fire, Baker's patterns are derived from the scarifying marks of fire itself; leaving burnt welts in its wake.

Curiously, Best herself appears mute; her perfect forms arising like the mountains on a Chinese scroll, evoking the silence between forms to be filled by the viewer with their own poetic musings. Her private language is cryptic, consisting of the subtlest surface pattern and of essential form: the bowl, the jar, the bottle.

In contrast to Best's assemblages, Fuller works alone. She seeks to discover, through immersion in the calligraphic gesture, meaning that is beyond words. Paradoxically as a child she was a precise and gifted draftsman whose skill led to an early career as a medical illustrator, one of the more exacting forms of representation.

She has travelled far from empirical illustration of cells, organs and vascular systems, arriving at a place where she now creates bold abstract images with a loose brush on absorbent rice paper.

Fuller embarked on a journey to re-discover the part of her expressive self that was educated out of her via a teacher's ruler to the back of her hand. She has said that her destination is a 'primitive self' connected and true<sup>2</sup>. In contemporary Australian art the 'primitive' has been conflated with the 'indigenous' and there are certainly strong similarities between her work and some recent painting from Central Australia.

Geoff Bardon was the first to write about the haptic quality of the Papunya Tula painters<sup>3</sup>. In my experiences working with the same artists, they characteristically touched their paintings as they described their work to me, using the sensitive underside of their fingertips to trace the journeys of ancestral beings across the canvas<sup>4</sup>. Similarly, sacred objects are rubbed to promote osmosis of spiritual essence through a membrane of red ochre and fat. But this gesture is about personal power as well as reverence. When describing various elements of a huge map-like painting, Uta Uta Tjangala remained seated but picked up a rock to throw on the section of the painting he was referring to - his very physical contact confirming authority for the stories represented on the canvas<sup>5</sup>.

Emily Kame Kngwarray's massive painting *Untitled (Big Yam)*,<sup>6</sup> like Fuller's *Rag Trade* series, has bold white lines on a monochromatic background. While Kngwarray evokes a broad flat land, her brush gesture, like Fuller's, is informed by action. Gesture is central to Fuller's recent painting; it comes from familiarity with the weave of fabric, as if finding the sweet spot in the horizontal and vertical fibres. In Kngwarray's case it is about digging, the white lines like the repetitive blows of a digging stick, tracing the roots and juicy rhizomes of yam plants. The confidence of Kngwarray's gesture comes from a lifetime of digging yams.

Similarly Fuller has worked fabric, inheriting skills from her older female relatives - generations of stitching, repairing and making garments. For both artists the patterns of their daily lives permeate their paintings, from the inside out. The curious visual similarities of their mature work may be put down to the *Zeitgeist*, for their cultural backgrounds could not be more different.

Like pondering the meaning of a word, when you look long enough at a work of art its textual meaning dissolves before your eyes. Can you in truth, write a painting? Or is the voice of the maker more apparent from the physical traces of their action? Superficially, Robin Best's compositions are essays on cultural difference, while Helen Fuller's paintings are poems of cultural convergence. The complexity of their individual relationships with China and the art of Central Australia suggest that below the surface of these works other stories shift uneasily, waiting for their moment to be told. ■

<sup>1</sup> In Pitjanjatjara/Yankunytjatjara - *Punu* means wood or tree and anything made of wood. *Ku* is a possessive ending meaning 'relating to' or 'associated with'. *Walka* means meaningful marks and can be applied to patterns on plants, the earth, sky and animals as well as those made by people. Hence *punuku walka* means the patterns made by artists on the wooden arte-facts they make.

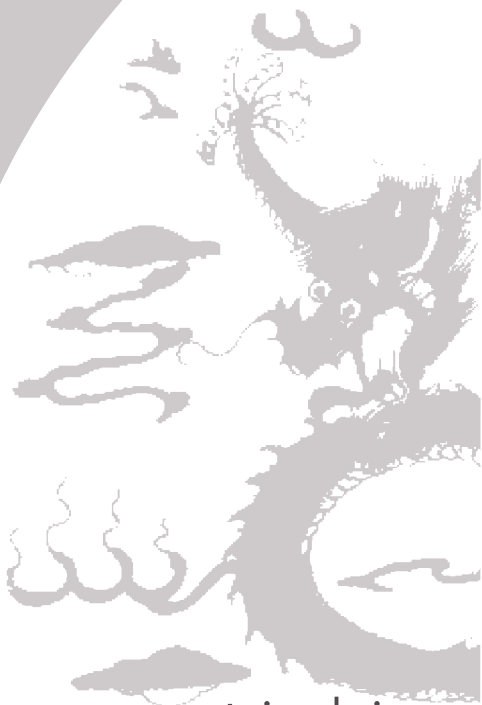
<sup>2</sup> In conversation with the author, May 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Bardon, Geoff. *Aboriginal Art of the Western Desert*, Rigby, Adelaide, 1979.

<sup>4</sup> The author was the Art Advisor to Papunya Tula Artists Pty Ltd, 1977-79.

<sup>5</sup> In conversation with the author at his outstation Muyin on the NT-WA border, 1984.

<sup>6</sup> Emily Kame Kngwarray, *Untitled (Big Yam)* 1996 is in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria.



# Linking

Mary Eagle

The title *Writing a Painting*, alluding to the Chinese ideogram for painting a work of art, and the Australian Aboriginal concept of painting the body, could also refer to the mix of direct observation and mental preparation in picturing this exhibition in historical context: or so I have thought.

From the curator's perspective 'writing a painting' could highlight the difference between the two artists: Helen Fuller pushed along by an evocative manner of painting (in a quiet way taking account of certain possibilities); and Robin Best shaping her art to include (but not to control or explain) the art of others.

The curatorial concept takes in the historical echo of the gallery's concrete chamber: the same place in previous phases where Aboriginal, Chinese and European people, in sequence and together, sang, worshipped, fought, made works of art and craft, were born and died.

It seems that the writing of a painting as a mental picture recovered for the present from the past, is well-known as a Chinese, Japanese or Aboriginal cultural practice. It looms in those cultures whereas its pervasive presence in the cultures of the West is mostly downplayed. Yet there are Western equivalents to the cultivation of ancestral memory. One non-art form that flourishes enormously today is family history: there is an aspect of election in the popular pursuit of family history, as there is in a modern Aboriginal, Chinese or Finnish artist cultivating a traditional style.

The way ideas spark between points previously not linked (by such electricity!) has been much discussed down the ages. The German scholar Walter Benjamin's image was of illumination, when an otherwise featureless event or object is clarified in the light of one's prepared mind.

So, Vivonne, saw in Helen Fuller's paintings (that resemble weavings) the possibility of a link with the loosely brushed lines of Chinese characters and the lines drawn in the sand by Indigenous Australians, as being both a language and an image. Fuller, soon after committing herself to the exhibition, noted that the handmade Chinese paper buckled and threatened to disintegrate when she brushed on the water-laden colour, but hardened to a new brittleness on drying. In turn, I was under the influence of Fuller's red paper panels when recently re-reading the poetry of Matsuo Bashō, and registered the emotive image of 'morning sun shining directly on the vermilion fencing' at the generally sombre Shrine of Shiogama.<sup>1</sup>

The promise and risk of this exhibition is the potential it has to transcend the separation of personal, domestic, exotic, native and foreign. The Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin identified the source of creativity in certain great works of literature as the enjambment in them of two languages: coexistence illuminating the qualities intrinsic to each. That concept is relevant for the contrast between Best's and Fuller's art linked in this exhibition, and for Robin Best's collaboration with the Anangu Pitjantjatjara artist Nyukana (Daisy) Baker and Chinese artist Huang Xiuqian. For the work *Under and Over* Baker painted the *punuku walka* design employed by the Anangu Pitjantjatjara women to decorate the underside of the wooden vessels (*wira*) used for collecting bush food; another vessel was painted by Huang with a traditional Chinese scene of mountains, water, fog and cloud; and Best's plain ceramic vessels take the *w*-shape of the Chinese mountains and *wira*. Verbally, Best noted the likeness between the Pitjantjatjara *punuku walka* and the *water pattern* used in Chinese and Japanese porcelain painting.

There is surprisingly little difference between the cross-cultural connections formed by Best and Fuller and the two artists I have chosen for historical comparison. As with Best and Fuller, the art of Matsuo Bashō, a seventeenth-century Japanese poet, and Ian Fairweather, an Anglo-Australian painter of the mid-twentieth century, was critically informed by Chinese culture. All four have taken their own art practice as a point of rest or grounding for enabling a play of alternatives. For Best the ground has been her practice of finely moulded ceramics. For Bashō it was his combination of *haiku* with prose. The ground for Fuller and Fairweather has been a personal style of painting. In their differing ways the four artists have yielded to outside observation (rather than making a requirement of inwardness): i.e. they have made art for publication or exhibition. Within a work they have used a conversational style of alternation, whereby a suggestion is picked up from a neighbouring line/image/object yet each of the parts occupies a 'world' of its own. For Fuller the variant expression has arisen minimally, out of inscribing almost-straight lines on a coloured ground. For Fairweather it arose from his manner of painting in response to a previous painting on the same surface, in some cases over-painting as many as sixty layers, of which only the uppermost are open to view. Variation, for Best, lies between her bare ceramic objects (assembled meaningfully) and the paintings by others that are incorporated in particular arrangements.

Similarly, Bashō incorporated poems by others in his work. In the art of all four one observes arrests in the flow within and between works. Continually moving in another direction, the use of metaphor divides attention between the physical mark (or verbal image) and a contrary meaning, and a cross-linking of categories of imagination, artistry or sign.

Poetic linking has an affective tradition in the West though it is infinitely more powerful in Aboriginal and Chinese cultures (modes unconstrained by the West's duo of representation and reason revolving endlessly upon a few tenets of philosophy). In the context of *Writing a Painting* Fuller's paintings, chameleon-like, take on a colouring of China: the reference was already respectfully in mind as Fuller painted yet in another display might not be apparent. Within each of Best's assemblages there is an atmosphere of attention to the conjoined paintings by Baker and Huang whereas the 'meaning' of the conjunction is left undefined: in the gap resides the art's claim to attention. Fairweather's reply to those who categorised his paintings as *abstract* was that he liked to 'retain some element of subjective reality'.<sup>2</sup> The Chinese reference extended beyond the scenic to an ideographic mode of semi-abstract notation. Fairweather's reading of Chinese ideograms began around the time he first studied painting and both activities continued throughout his life.

Over time the two became entwined, to the point where Fairweather's mature manner of painting was comparable to his reading of Chinese characters, in that both involved a multiplicity of cryptic suggestions.

In the light of the exhibition title *Writing a Painting* it is worth describing the influence more fully. As a translator of Chinese texts, Fairweather was struck by 'The fact...that no-body is really [allowing for] the characters not representing words, but ideas – As they are open to the widest interpretation – there is no exact translation almost you might say one man's guess is as good as another's – especially [when the text is in] the old classical language which is so cryptic and divorced from the spoken word – One can apprehend it as it were – as a whole – as an idea – it seems a pity really to put it into words at all – which makes it all very close to art.'<sup>3</sup>

Finally, Matsuo Bashō's field of reference unselfconsciously included Chinese poetry, visual art, and the scholarly tradition of attending closely to nature. Admiring a particular tree, he wrote: 'The chestnut is a holy tree, for the Chinese ideograph for chestnut is Tree placed directly below West, the direction of the holy land.'

On a difficult two year journey along *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, Bashō travelled through country he'd not been in before yet (like an artist on the international circuit today), he met up with fellow poets and most of the places he chose to visit were known to him by repute:

'My heart leaped with joy when I saw the celebrated pine tree of Takekuma, its twin trunks shaped exactly as described by the ancient poets. I was immediately reminded of the Priest Nōin who had grieved to find upon his second visit this same tree cut and thrown into the River Natori as bridge-piles by the newly-appointed governor of the province. This tree had been planted, cut, and replanted several times in the past, but just when I came to see it myself, it was in its original shape after a lapse of perhaps a thousand years, the most beautiful shape one could possibly think of for a pine tree.'

In case it should be thought that the linking of past and present through metaphor served Bashō merely as a device for classical repetition (or the academic mode sometimes laid at the door of international artists), the third instance from the Japanese poet is when, passing through the entrance to the northern road, duly preoccupied with 'recollection of ancient poets', he did not echo their well-dressed imagery but fastened on a piquant alternative: 'The first poetic venture I came across – The rice-planting songs Of the far north.'

In conclusion, I note a difference between the ground upon which Fuller and Best introduce other cultures into their work, and the ground upon which Bashō and Fairweather encrypt outside references. Bashō's combination of a prose travelogue with *haiku* by himself and his companion poets was a literary form of his own

creation that evolved over many years and is remembered as a great achievement. Fairweather's manner of painting, so prodigal of time and effort, was likewise his own solution and he, too, is remembered as a great artist. The ground of their art was shaped slowly and painfully around forms inserted from outside. Best and Fuller, on the other hand, have refrained from tying the visual form of their art to Chinese or Aboriginal culture. Writing as one who has believed in exercising restraint in cross-cultural work, I admit that it is an open question whether great art or scholarship will arise from it. Yet restraint, a condition of desirable transparency laid on us today, may yet be the beginning of the difficult, distorting passage to new forms. ■

<sup>1</sup> Matsuo Bashō, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches*, translated from the Japanese by Nobuyuki Yuasa (Penguin Books: London, 1966) p.114.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Fairweather letter to Treania Smith, 28 June 1957, access to letters courtesy of Murray Bail.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Fairweather letter to Lucy Swanton, circa April/May 1954, access to letters courtesy of Murray Bail.

<sup>4</sup> Matsuo Bashō, *op. cit.*, p107.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* p111.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* p107.

Tangkarlo pintyandi, tangkarlo wirkandi, tangkarlo marnendi  
用心作画 - 澳洲画家与中国 Artists



# Robin Best

Born 1953 Perth, Western Australia

## Tertiary Qualifications

- 1993 Graduate Diploma, Visual Arts, University of South Australia
- 1976 Diploma Design/Ceramics, South Australian School of Art

## Ceramics Projects

- 1998–2004 Coordinator of the *Ernabella Ceramics Project* based in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands, South Australia
- 1994–2002 Coordinator of the *CADCeram* Industrial Ceramics Project introducing Computer Aided Design and Manufacture to the Ceramics Studio of the JamFactory
- 2000–2001 Coordinator of *Design Lab* Project, JamFactory

## Awards, Grants and Residencies

- 2005 AsiaLink residency, Beijing, Australia China Council Residency, Beijing
- 2004 Artist in Residence, Seto, Japan
- 2003 New Work Grant, VACB Project Grant, Arts SA
- 2002 Project Grant, Arts SA
- 2001 South Australian Ceramic Award
- 1999 South Australian Design Award Grant to research CAD–CAM, VACB
- 1995 Project Grant, Arts SA
- 1988 Professional Development Grant, VACB
- 1982 Workshop Development Grant, VACB

## Selected Exhibitions

- 2006 *Writing a Painting*, South Australian School of Art Gallery
- 2005 *Snuff*, Madame Mao's Dowry, Shanghai  
*Collect*, Victoria & Albert Museum, London  
*Ceramics from Seto Collection*, Seto Cultural Centre, Japan
- 2004 *2004 – Australian Culture Now*, National Gallery of Victoria  
*New Work Inspired by Old Cultures*, Madame Mao's Dowry, Shanghai  
*Vessel: Diverse*, Quadrivium, Sydney
- 2003 *Ancient Futures*, National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto, Japan  
*Light Black*, JamFactory and touring to The Craft Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo; National Museum of Modern Art, Kyoto; National Museum for the Arts, Taiwan and Craft West, Perth  
*SALA Week*, Art Gallery of South Australia  
*Survey of South Australian Ceramics*, The Ceramic Art Gallery, Sydney
- 2002 *New Work*, Madame Mao's Dowry, Shanghai for Australia Week  
*Wild Nature*, JamFactory  
*Ritual of Tea*, JamFactory
- 2001 *Biennial*, JamFactory  
*Chemistry*, Art Gallery of South Australia  
*Robin Best – Marine Forms*, JamFactory
- 1999 *Off White*, JamFactory Biennial, JamFactory
- 1998 *Off-Line*, Adelaide Festival of Arts, JamFactory
- 1992 *Girl Traversing the Yarra*, Neon animation, Melbourne Festival
- 1990 *On-Site, Sculpture in City Spaces*, Australian Sculpture Triennial, Melbourne

## Collections

National Gallery of Scotland  
Seto Cultural Centre, Japan  
Art Gallery of South Australia  
Museum and Art Gallery of Tasmania  
Shepparton Regional Gallery, Victoria  
Victorian State Craft Collection, Melbourne  
University of South Australia  
Campbelltown City Art Gallery, New South Wales



**Robin Best**  
*Visiting Jingdezhen* 2004  
cast white porcelain (engraved with water pattern)  
with onglaze red enamel painting of Dragon and  
Phoenix pattern by **Hu Lian Qiang** of Jingdezhen  
Dimensions variable  
Private collection Shanghai  
Photo Grant Handcock



**Robin Best**

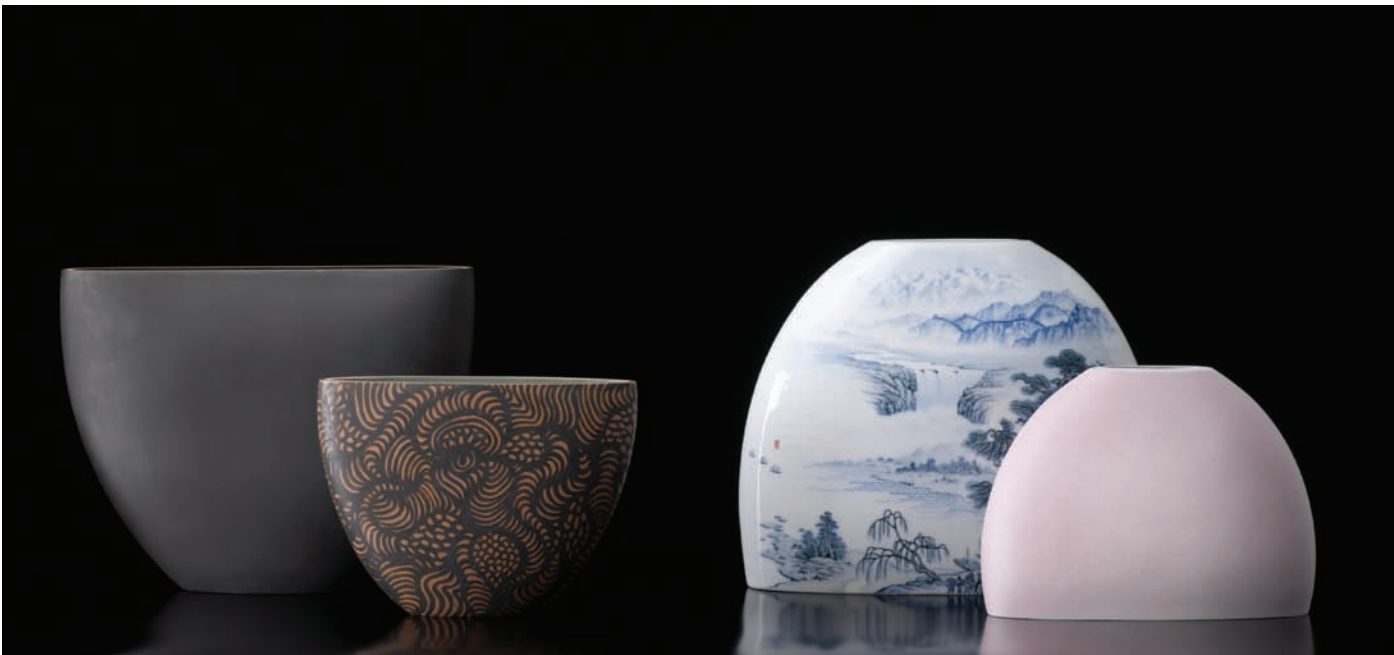
*Visiting Pukotja* 2004

cast, coloured porcelain with underglaze black  
*punuku waka* by **Nyukana Baker** of Enabella

Dimensions variable

Private collection London

Photo Grant Handcock



**Robin Best**

*Under and Over* (four elements), 2006  
cast white porcelain with *punuku waka* painted  
in black glaze by **Nyukana Baker** of Enabella and  
underglaze landscape painting by **Huang Xiujian**  
of Jingdezhen  
Dimensions variable  
Photo Grant Handcock

# Helen Fuller

Born 1949 Adelaide, South Australia

## Tertiary Qualifications

- 1994 Master of Visual Arts, University of South Australia
- 1978 Diploma Fine Art/Painting, South Australian School of Art

## Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2005 *Helen Fuller*, Sullivan+Strumpf Fine Art, Sydney; *Gingham Grids*, Helen Maxwell Gallery, Canberra
- 2004 *Helen Fuller: Dirndl Patterns*, Watson Place Gallery, Melbourne; *White Elephant Black Sheep*, Prospect Gallery, Adelaide
- 2003 Rag installation, Wilderness School, Adelaide
- 2002 *cha T*, JamFactory, Adelaide
- 1998 *...the thing about Present History*, Noosa Regional Gallery, Queensland; *Vault: Ian North/Helen Fuller*, EAF, Adelaide
- 1997 *Drawings*, aGOG Australian Girls Own Gallery, Canberra
- 1996 *BCF: Caravan*, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide
- 1995 *Helen Fuller: BCF*, University of South Australia Art Museum, Adelaide; *Drawings*, Gallery 482, Brisbane
- 1994 *Recent drawings*, aGOG Australian Girls Own Gallery, Canberra
- 1993 *Helen Fuller*, China World Hotel, Beijing; Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, Hangzhou, China
- 1991-1992 *Helen Lillecrapp-Fuller: A Visual Diary, 1979-1991* Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

## Grants and Residencies

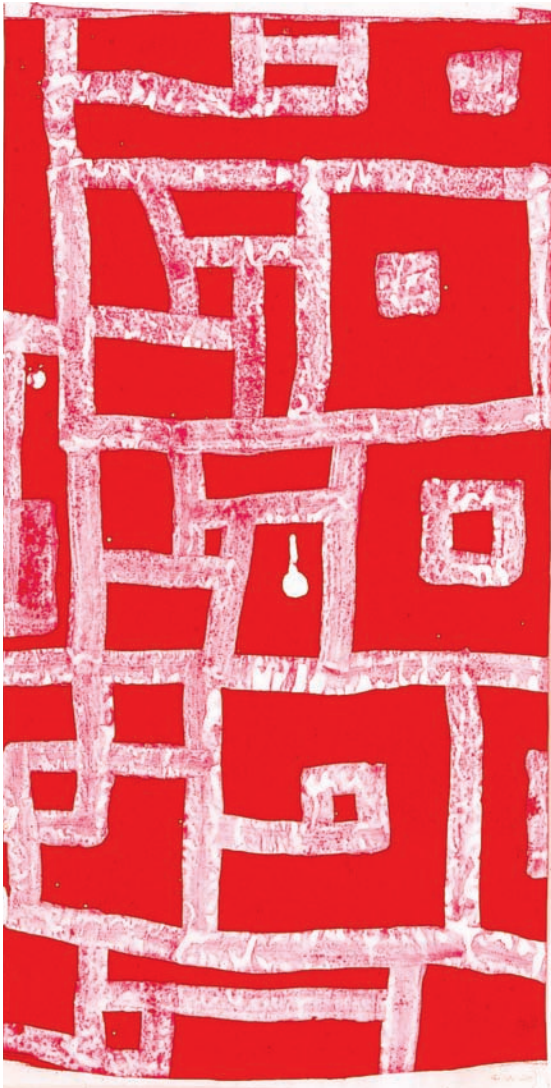
- 2004 Fellowship Grant, Arts SA
- 2003 Artist in Residence, Wilderness School, Adelaide
- 1998 Artist in Residence, Noosa Regional Gallery, Queensland
- 1997 Project Grant, Arts SA
- 1995 Project Grant, Arts SA
- 1992 Asialink Residency, Zhejiang Academy of Fine Arts, Hangzhou, China
- 1986 Project Grant, VACB
- 1982 Project Grant, VACB
- 1982 Artist in Residence, North Brisbane CAE

## Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2006 *Writing a Painting*, South Australian School of Art Gallery
- 2004 *From The Ephemeral To The Eternal*, curator Stephen Rainbird, UniSA Art Museum, Adelaide
- 2002 *Installation Stills*, curator Niki Vouis, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne
- 2001/2 *Home is where the heart is*, curator Vivonne Thwaites, UniSA Art Museum, Adelaide (travelling exhibition)
- 2000 *Chemistry: Art in South Australia*, Art Gallery of South Australia
- 1999 *The Faulding Exhibition*, Art Gallery of South Australia
- 1998 *All this and Heaven too*, Adelaide Biennial, Art Gallery of South Australia; *False Endings*, Canberra Contemporary Art Space, ACT; *Reform*, Griffith Artworks, Griffith University, Queensland
- 1997 *Mutant Paradigm*, curator John Barbour, CACSA, Adelaide
- 1996 *Recent Acquisitions*, Art Gallery of South Australia; *The Power to Move; Aspects of Australian Photography*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

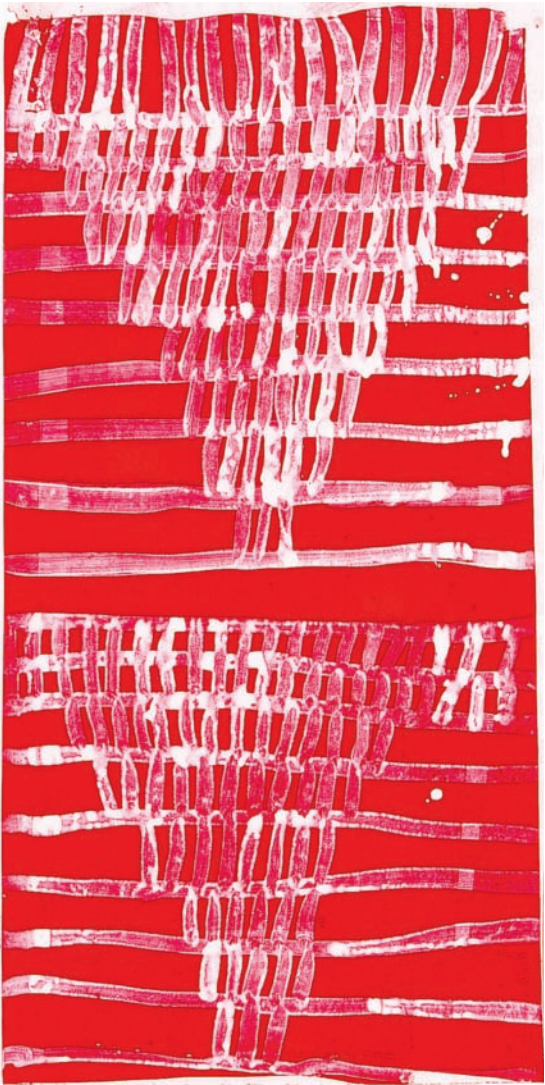
## Collections

- Arco Coal Australia Inc, Brisbane
  - Artbank
  - Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
  - Australia National Gallery, Canberra
  - Brisbane City Hall Art Gallery and Museum
  - Flinders University Art Collection, Adelaide
  - Gold Coast City Art Gallery
  - Griffith University, Brisbane
  - Ipswich City Council Art Gallery, Queensland
  - Museum of Contemporary Art, Brisbane
  - National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
  - Parliament House Collection, Canberra
  - Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
  - Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane
  - Sir James and Lady Cruthers Collection, Perth
  - University Art Museum, University of Queensland, Brisbane
  - University College of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba
  - Wilderness School, Adelaide
- Helen Fuller is represented by Helen Maxwell Gallery (ACT), Sullivan + Strumpf Fine Art (NSW) and Watson Place Gallery (VIC).



**Helen Fuller**  
*Rag Trade No. 5*, 2005  
acrylic on Chinese paper  
99 x 50cm  
Photo Michal Klivanek

Helen Fuller  
*Rag Trade No. 1*, 2005  
acrylic on Chinese paper  
99 x 50cm  
Photo Michal Klivanek





Helen Fuller  
*Rag Trade No. 2*, 2005  
acrylic on Chinese paper  
99 x 50cm  
Photo Michal Klivanek



## Huang Xiuqian

# Huang Xiuqian

- 1939 Born in Yongxiu Country, Jiangxi Province, China.
- 1962 Graduated from Jing De Zhen Ceramic Institute and began to study European Old Master Painting.
- 1962 Teaching arts and crafts.
- 1966 In 1966, all schools are ordered to stop teaching.
- 1969-1975 Imprisoned during the Cultural Revolution, worked as a carpenter and painted propaganda images for the state.
- 1997 Created *Gazing Far into the Distance*, a porcelain plaque painting using new techniques he developed in Jingdezhen. It was selected for Jingdezhen Porcelain Fair organized by the municipal government of Jingdezhen in the Museum of Chinese History in Beijing.  

At his studio in Jingdezhen he developed many new porcelain painting techniques and created many official public works for the Chinese Government.
- 1997 *Dragon and Lotus-Flower Zun and Five Lions Celebrate Peace* a huge tripod was commissioned to mark Hong Kong's return to the motherland.
- 1999 *Two Tigers* an underglaze painted relief porcelain plaque won first prize at the Third Arts and Crafts Competition of Jiangxi Province.
- 2003 *Speaking in Dreams*, first book of poems published in Hong Kong.
- 2004 Feature article 'Huang Xiuqian: Master of the Chinese Ceramic Language' *China Pictorial – Special Issue: The Millennium Anniversary of Jingdezhen (1004-2004)*.



**Huang Xuqian**

*Five Lions Celebrating Peace*, 1999

50 x 75 cm  
porcelain

'This work was made in memory of the 50th anniversary of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The work is engraved in two layers with 51 balls (inserted rotating pearl) enclosed in the hollow mouth edge, indicating 51 years (1949 -1999) of the PRC. On each of the balls works and patterns are carved. The five dancing lions symbolize the strength and prosperity of the Chinese nation and the vigor of the contemporary society. The jar is decorated in the three traditional Chinese high-temperature colours of yellow, green and red.'

*China Pictorial - Special Issue*, 2004, China Pictorial Publications, p5 and 47, Beijing

Artists collection.

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## Nyukana (Daisy) Baker

# Nyukana (Daisy) Baker

- 1943 Nyukana (Daisy) Baker was born at Ernabella on the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Lands in the remote north-west of South Australia. Her parents had come in from the bush in Western Australia so that their children could be educated to cope with the profound and absolute changes in traditional Indigenous life that faced them. Daisy grew up and was educated in the Presbyterian Mission conducted at Ernabella.
- 1958 Nyukana joined the craft room which the mission had started and equipped with hand looms to take advantage of the wool from the sheep the mission ran to provide income. This was her beginning as an artist, and the start of an unbroken and extraordinary forty-eight year career of arts practice.
- Daisy became an expert weaver and also specialised in hand-tufted small rugs in which she incorporated a patterning or *walka* that is specific to Anangu Pitjantjatjara art as it has developed over the last fifty-seven years.
- 1971 The 'craft room' artists were introduced to batik and Daisy became a leading exponent.
- 1975 She studied batik techniques at the Yogyakarta Batik Institute and demonstrated her expertise in many places in Australia as well as in Japan in 1983 at the Osaka Ethnographic Museum and Gallery. Her batik has been chosen for scores of touring exhibitions nationally, and internationally to North America, the UK, Japan, France, the Netherlands, Poland, and South East Asia and is featured in all state and national collections in Australia as well as the Commonwealth Institute and the British Museum.
- 1990 Daisy and other Ernabella artists began printmaking on paper and screenprinting. Fabric designs, printed at Ernabella, are in the Powerhouse Museum and Art Gallery of SA collections and her prints on paper are in national collections.
- 1992–2000 Daisy was Chairperson of Ernabella Arts Inc (incorporated 1974) and has regularly served as Anangu *Mayatja* (Manager) at the art centre.
- 1997 Ceramic work was introduced to Ernabella. Daisy pioneered the use of batik techniques on ceramic for decoration and her underglaze painted work freely uses a variety of *walka* to great effect particularly *punuku walka* – the curvilinear marks used to decorate carved wooden artefacts. Her recent works using these styles of decoration were exhibited and respectively Highly Commended and acquired in the 2004 *Telstra NATSI Art Award*, and in 2005 at *Collect* for the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



**Enabella Arts**

Enabella, South Australia, Australia established 1948

Nyukana BAKER, Language group Pitjanjatjara

born Enabella 1943

*Untitled* (plate) 1998

Terracotta Plate made by Robin Best, 1998, Adelaide and Enabella,  
South Australia

terracotta, underglaze painting of punuku walka.

2.8 x 37.0 cm diameter

Painted on back, black "Nyukana Baker". Not dated.

Faulding 150 Anniversary Fund for South Australian Contemporary Art 1999  
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

## Writers' Biographies

**Mary Eagle**, a senior member of the art community, has been art critic, university academic and curator. She was the Head of the Department of Australian Art, National Gallery of Australia from 1982 to 1999. She is the author of a number of books about Australian art. In 2005 she completed a doctoral thesis (her second), based on Indigenous and 'new' Australian art, titled *A history of Australian Art 1830-1930, told through the lives of the objects*.

**Nicholas Jose** is the author of *Chinese Whispers*, *Cultural Essays* (1995), a memoir, *Black Sheep: Journey to Borroloola* (2002) and several acclaimed novels including *The Rose Crossing* (1994), *The Red Thread* (2000) and *Original Face* (2005). He was Cultural Counsellor at the Australian Embassy, Beijing from 1987 to 1990.

He has written widely on contemporary Asian and Australian culture and was curatorial advisor to the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney for *Mao Goes Pop* (1993) and *ARTTAIWAN* (1995).

He currently holds the Chair of Creative Writing at the University of Adelaide.

[www.nicholasjose.com.au](http://www.nicholasjose.com.au)

**John Kean** was 2004 Thomas Ramsay Science and Humanities Scholar at the Museum of Victoria. His career spans both visual art and museum sectors. In the late 1970s John was Art Advisor for Papunya Tula Artists, a collective of central Australian painters who changed the face of painting in Australia. He was inaugural Exhibitions Coordinator at Tandanya National Aboriginal Cultural Institute in Adelaide before taking up the position of Exhibitions Coordinator of the Fremantle Arts Centre. In 1996 he joined Museum Victoria as Creative Producer and has been a driving force behind many of the most innovative exhibitions and displays at the museums since that time. The most recent exhibition he worked on was *Treasures: Museum Victoria celebrates 150 years*. He has written extensively on Indigenous art and the representation of Indigenous and natural subjects in Australian museums.

**Vivonne Thwaites** is an Adelaide-based curator. Some projects are *Talking.Listening* (1994); *Three Views of Kurna Territory Now* (1998); *Karrawirraparri* (2000); *Home is where the heart is* (2001 and touring) and *Holy Holy Holy* (2004 and touring). Thwaites is a recipient of the Cité Internationale des Arts Power Institute Studio for 2006 awarded by the University of Sydney.

