

Sea Sings, Black Sands
and Winged Realm

JO DARVALL, BETHWYN PORTER & MARTIN KING

HEATHCOTE MUSEUM & GALLERY
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The alchemy of printmaking transforms experience through a process of mechanical re-imagining. Vision is transmuted and reproduced in a limited edition of images that provide us with new insights into our world and open our options for engagement with some things we thought we knew and others we have never encountered. Each artist's approach is a process in itself, and it takes time to reveal, tease out and untangle their meaning.

Artists have used traditional print media for centuries, and that continues today, probably more than ever before, so contemporary printmaking is partly defined by the tension between printmaking as a distinct terrain, which over time has acquired its own discursive space, and the hybrid instinct of the contemporary artist, for whom such boundaries are permeable.

Jo Darvall, Bethwyn Porter and Martin King have developed their ideas through a process of thinking that combines a sophisticated knowledge of the mechanics of making with a compelling need to communicate with their audience. Their 'printmaking thinking' is a structured way of making sense of image making that encourages their audience to dig deep into the hidden meanings layered within the subject matter they present, even if they are not fore-grounded.

Their work provides us with new lenses to focus our gaze and re-encounter a world we thought we knew and understood. That has been the role of artists for millennia and it is why we prize them so highly, why we need them so much. Whether inspired by the river, recording notes from a child or a response to a littoral shore, their works open up new vistas, recalibrate experience and reframe our understanding. All three interrogate what can be achieved in printmaking. Utilising print and digital media, they have created an immersive installation in response to the environment and historic site of Heathcote that will forever impact on our sense of this place. Interpreting the building's history through their re-imaginings of a world animated by winged birds circling above, trees and sounds of the sea and childhood memories, they invite us to embark on a journey of discovery and reinvention.

Jo and Bethwyn's monochrome monoprints feature images of the landscape around the Swan River Print Studio and document a changing environment initiated by the establishment of a colonial settlement. Formerly an important site of the Beeliar Indigenous elders, the colonizers initially considered Heathcote as the site for

the capital of Western Australia, though eventually they established the settlement of Perth further up the river. Drawing from stories that the shoreline was once covered in black sand Jo and Bethwyn provide an opportunity to re-imagine the area and its history, shaped over time by the Derbarl Yerrigan.

The works of Martin King complement these works and create an imaginary journey from the perspective of a small child. Spotlit on the darkened walls of the Heathcote gallery they enhance the complex, free-standing, mixed-media installation Searching for Bird River. It includes a hand-drawn, stop-motion DVD that animates the etching onto which the projected images cascade. Gazing onto what appears to be a facsimile of two pages of an open sketchbook lying on the top of a metre-high column of coffee-table art books, the silhouette of a dove wildly flaps over the page.

Found objects, recorded in Bethwyn's handmade book — a record of a year collecting plastic debris found on her walks along Point Heathcote Reserve, Bibra Lake Wetlands and Woodman Point Regional Park — alert us to the vulnerability of nature and the complexities of human interference.

For Jo, art and storytelling are intrinsically linked as she takes us on a journey through a mythical dream of past encounters set in a fertile organic playground where shapes and images constantly replicate. In Gold Lotus and the recent Winged Realm series she reassembles the lotus — the sacred symbol of purity in Buddhism, beauty in Hinduism and rebirth in ancient Egypt — to evoking a story of kingdoms doomed to repeat their mistakes.

Within the amalgam of medium and content in the work of these three artists we come close to understanding more about that notion of 'printmaking thinking'. It lies at the heart of how to weld together an idea with an image that is communicable in multiples through a sophisticated process of duplication. Their exhibition engages us with embedded images and the ideas that document how each has developed their own practice, their own vision and their own way of chronicling their engagement with the environments they inhabit.

Professor Ted Snell, AM CitWA, is Chief Cultural Officer and Director of the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery at the University of Western Australia. He has published books and articles and curated numerous exhibitions, many of which document the visual culture of Western Australia.

Image: Jo Darvall, *Winged Realm (B & C) 2019*, 95 x 70 cm Monoprint and Chine-collé on Hahnemühle



1. Martin King, *False ornithology indigo*, etchings, relief etchings, wax, hard cover books
2. Martin King, *Three frames from melencolia*, 94cm x 42.5cm, etching
3. Bethwyn Porter, *Book 1 2019*, Handbound artists' book, 21 x 28 cm, Pigment transfer and Chine-collé on Zerkall
4. Bethwyn Porter, *The Sound 2019*, 29 x 53 cm, Monoprint and Chine-collé on Hahnemühle
5. Jo Darvall, *Winged Realm B 2019*, 95 x 70 cm Monoprint and Chine-collé on Hahnemühle
6. Jo Darvall, *Winged Realm No 11C 2019*, 95 x 70 cm Monoprint and Chine-collé on Hahnemühle

