

LIVING WITH ART





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There is no doubt that Margaret Tuckson lives with art, but it is relevant to know how that art made its way into her life. It mostly got there in an unplanned, fortuitous way. Some warmed her heart because of a felt affinity; other objects excited her aesthetically and, inevitably, her acquisitive senses; some were gifts.

Collections in the general course hold only the narrowest insight into the collector's life and mind. Not so with this exhibition. In it we are invited into a more personal situation. We are invited into Margaret's early married life to the handsome airman she married who became the obsessive painter, the consummate public gallery administrator and the most effective advocate for Aboriginal art. It can be seen that their marriage and her exceptional proficiency in and love of pottery were aspects that lent considerable and unpredictable interest to her life.

In a poem *Prayer for My Daughter*, W.B. Yeats hopes for his daughter a life 'rooted in one dear perpetual place'. He felt that out of this rootedness, this belonging to a place, to its customs and ceremonies, an innocence of heart and beauty of being would arise. He didn't envisage a stay-at-home housewife, but a deep sense of belonging to one place.

A book of Margaret's life would be full of travel; where she went and what she saw, such as meetings of the Pacific Arts Association in Honolulu, Paris and Auckland, and the Australian Museum Society to Easter Island, meeting with Thor Heyerdahl, for instance. Other trips included Alaska, Nepal and a ten month tour in Europe with Tony. In 1958, a trip to Melville Island encouraged an ongoing interest in Aboriginal art and in 1966, a trip to New Guinea lead to five more trips and culminated in the book coauthored with Patricia May, *The Traditional Pottery of Papua New Guinea*, which lead to more travel and speaking engagements at the universities of Yale, Harvard, London and so on.

All the travel seems to me an expression of someone with an adventurous, enquiring mind. That someone is the Margaret Tuckson who, while I've known her, lived in Wāhroonga and now Chatswood. Before I met her she had lived near to and been a student at Abbotsleigh. In fact, a woman 'rooted in one dear perpetual place' – a place that is rich for her in her own personal history; a history that encompasses many friendships.

It follows that many of the works here are imbued with Margaret's warm friendship for the maker as well as pleasure in what has been made. Some of the makers I only



know through Margaret's regard for them; Klaus Friedeberger, Ray Coles. Others I've met. There was the deep mutual respect between Margaret and the late Gwyn Hanssen Pigott; and the joy of creating that flows between her and the Monks family. The steadfast friendship of Richard MacMillan is there in his work.

I mention a few, but I think everything takes on a special quality if we try to look through Margaret's eyes.

Most affecting in this regard are the paintings by Tony Tuckson, made more special for us in this exhibition when we view them not so much as important art works but as physical memories of a husband much loved.

Geoffrey Legge
2014



MARGARET TUCKSON

Dinner plate

Undated (pictured left)
Earthenware, Manganese edge
28 cm width

Plate

Undated
Earthenware, wood fired
23 cm width

Small plate

C. 2004
Earthenware, borax glaze,
19 cm wide
Glaze developed by Margaret Tuckson

Large bowl

C. 2004 | Earthenware, borax glaze
20 cm wide, 9 cm high
Glaze developed by Margaret Tuckson

Casserole

Undated
Earthenware, 30 cm high

Three beakers

Undated
Earthenware, grey glaze with
manganese decoration
Each 9-9.5 cm high

Paintbrush jar (for Tony Tuckson)

Undated
Earthenware, 15 cm high
Made specifically for Tony Tuckson to
put his paint brushes in. Now used in
the kitchen to hold wooden spoons.

Wood fired cylinder

Undated
Earthenware, wood fired
16.5 cm high

Ceramic forms

Undated
Earthenware, 9.5cm high

Hand printed skirt

Cotton
Printed during studies at East Sydney
Tech with Phyllis Shillito

Painted box

C. 1938
Readymade box, painted decoration
23.5 x 9 cm

PAM GRAHAM gift to Margaret Tuckson (pictured left)

1938
Box painted with Abbotsleigh badge,
Readymade box, paint, 10 x 8 cm

From *The traditional pottery of Papua New Guinea*, Patricia May and Margaret Tuckson, Bay Books 1982 Nabwageta Island, Amphlett Islands

Fig. 9.133 Ramus, from Yenigo village, showing a fern frond, a model for one of the typical decorations for this area, East Sepik Province

Fig. 10.2 Three M'buke Island girls with cooking and water pots and a frying pan, Manus Province

Fig. 10.6 Hedwig, dressed ready for a 'singsing' on Hus Island, demonstrating paddle and anvil technique, Manus Province

Fig. 9.83 Rabundogum woman bringing pots to show the authors, Plains Boiken, East Sepik Province (pictured left)

Fig. 9.94 Nanguimam and Boliabi, the last two potters in Soandogum, Plains Boiken, in 1972, burnishing pots made for the authors, East Sepik Province



TONY TUCKSON

Represented by Watters Gallery, Sydney

Untitled (*Spitfires at the Ready*)

January-November 1943
Pencil and watercolour on paper
24.6 x 28.9 cm

Untitled (*Tent Interior, Nightcliff, Darwin*)

January-November 1943
Charcoal and watercolour on paper
24.4 x 31 cm

Untitled (*Bisset House, Warrawee*)

1946-49?
Watercolour on paper
26.5 x 36.5 cm

Musicians No 3

1949
Oil on canvas
70 x 101 cm

Untitled (*Portrait of Margaret*)

C. 1942-49
Watercolour, charcoal and ink on thick
watercolour paper
39.5 x 29.2 cm (irregular)

**Untitled (*self portrait*) possibly in East
Gordon studio**

C. 1946-49
Oil on canvas
101.5 x 71 cm

Untitled (*self portrait*)

C. 1947-49
Oil on canvas
36 x 28 cm

Untitled (*Michael*)

C. 1949-50
Oil on pulpboard
61 x 36 cm (irregular)

Untitled (*The Birthday Boy*)

C. 1950
Chalk and brown ink on paper
38.7 x 55.9 cm (irregular)

Untitled (*Margaret No 2*)

1952-56
Watercolour on paper
38 x 56.3 cm

Untitled (*Family Group No 1*)

1955-1957
Oil wash and charcoal on paper
76.3 x 101.5 cm

Untitled (*still life*)

C. 1949-1959
Gouache on paper
10.2 x 14.15 cm

Untitled (*Abstract on newspaper No 2*)

C. 1959
Oil on newspaper
79.7 x 61 cm

Untitled (*Pap Op*)

C. 1958-1961
Oil on synthetic polymer on composition
board
122 x 91.5 cm

Untitled (*collage*)

C. 1963
PVA and collage of stockings, bikini strap,
shirt tail and paper on hardboard
122 x 91.5 cm

Untitled (*stockings and telegraph*)

C. 1963
Paint, PVA and collage on masonite
122 x 123 cm

Untitled

C. 1970-73
Charcoal and PVA on paper
58.5 x 45.6 cm

Untitled (*Pink with charcoal lines*)

1973
Acrylic on masonite, two panels



ABORIGINAL ART

Unknown artist
(Might be by Ilgari, from Milingimbi)

Digeridoo

No date, before 1958
Earth pigments on wood
120 cm x circumference 6 cm
Purchased by the Margaret and Tony Tuckson in Darwin in 1958 during the Melville Island trip

Mawulan Marika (c. 1908-1967)

Untitled

C. 1959
Earth pigments on eucalyptus bark
36 x 18.6 cm
Collected by Margaret and Tony Tuckson at Yirrkala in 1959

WANDJUK MARIKA OBE (1927-1987)

Untitled (Wandjuk's Mother's Dreaming)

C. 1959
Earth pigments on eucalyptus bark
48 x 26 cm
Collected by Margaret and Tony Tuckson at Yirrkala in 1959

Joseph Mudjidell

Sturt Creek, Tanami Desert

Before 1994
Acrylic on canvas
90 x 60 cm
Purchased by Margaret from Warlayirk Artists Aboriginal Corporation, Balgo Hills

Unknown artist

Painted shells

No date
Earth colours on shells
48 x 10 cm (approximately)
Purchased around 1991 by Margaret Tuckson in Melbourne

Thancoupie (1937-2011)

The Raindancers

1977
Stoneware salt glazed jar
31 cm high

LYDIA BURAK

Body Design

Natural ochre on canvas
44 x 35 cm

PHILLIP GUDTHAY KUDTHAY

Badurru hollow log coffin

1992-3
Ochres on bark
153 x 39 cm
Purchased by Margaret Tuckson from the Art Centre Ramingining, Arnhem Land

UNKNOWN ARTIST

Camp dogs

No date
Pandanus fibre, wood and paint
Each 14 cm long



PAPUA NEW GUINEA

Unknown artist

Untitled (female figure)

1960?

Carved and painted wood and raffia skirt
163 x 23.5 cm

Purchased by Tony Tuckson in April
1970

Unknown artist, Sepik

Untitled

1970-73?

Earth pigments on basketry
65 x 35 cm

Purchased by Margaret Tuckson at
Maprik High School craft market
while on a pottery research trip. It
was bought from Tuaikim Village by a
student for this market to raise money
for the school. May 1973

Unknown artist

Untitled (Bandicoot)

C. 1984

Woven or knitted string
60 x 39 cm

Purchased by Margaret Tuckson at
Tambanam from hundreds of woven
and carved items set out on both sides
of the path along the river village to
tempt buyers

Photographs by Richard Glover taken at Margaret Tuckson's home in February 2014

Motu Water pot, (hodu), stained with
mangrove bark soaked in water,
Central Province, 16 cm high
Collected by Margaret Tuckson 1965

Chalice made for use in the
Catholic Church, stained with
mangrove bark 18 cm high
Collected by Margaret Tuckson 1966

Sago storage jar, Aibom, Sepik River,
applied and painted decoration,
36 cm high

Pila cooking vessel showing reduction
firing and smudging marks, Madang
Province

Pila cooking pot, (Senai), Madang
province, 19 cm high
Collected by Margaret Tuckson 1973

Pot stands for holding pot above fire,
19 cm high



ADMIRERD ARTISTS

John Armstrong

Untitled (paper clip necklace)

C. 1970
Paper clips and solder
41 x 18 cm

John Davis (1936-1999)

Nomad 1-20 (No 13)

1993
Eucalyptus twigs, paper,
bondcrete and bituminous paint
Approximately 17 x 43 cm

Sue Ford (1943-2009)

And God was happy to have a new country

1990
Ink and watercolour on canvas
23 x 34.5 cm

Sue Ford (1943-2009)

Gestation, from the series
Continuum
C. 2003
Pegasus print, edition of 10
97 x 138 cm

Klaus Friedeberger

Michael Tuckson

Undated
Oil on canvas

Klaus Friedeberger

Untitled

1990
Watercolour and collage on paper
37.5 x 37.5 cm

Gwyn Hanssen Pigott (1935-2013)

Small mug

Undated
Stoneware
8.5 cm high

Gwyn Hanssen Pigott (1935-2013)

Three bottles

1987
Stoneware
Each 30 cm high, 8 cm at base

Hilary Kelman

Hand woven jumper

Hair from Margaret Tuckson's
cross Border Collie dog Roly,
spun with crimply sheep's wool
65 x 152 cm

Judith King

Kosciusko Summer

1982?
Hand printed etching on paper, AP
29.5 x 22 cm

Robert Klippel (1920-2001)

Tree Forms (pictured left)
1965
Bronzed and welded steel, found
objects, mostly typewriters
122 x 94 cm

Colin Lanceley

A Glimpse of the Navel

1963
Watercolour and collage on paper
54.5 x 37 cm

Richard Mcmillan

Danger and Delight Variation

1991
Wood relief
28.7 x 30.8 cm

Richard Mcmillan

Idée Fixe

1988
Linoleum
14 x 13 cm

Janet Mansfield

Stoneware jar
30 cm high

Clement Meadmore (1929 Melbourne-2005 New York)

Straight Life

1959-60?, Iron plate, 60.5 x 27 cm
Represented by Robin Gibson
Gallery, Sydney

Reg Mombasa (Chris O'Doherty)

Hillside near Merriwa

2009, Charcoal, coloured
pencil on paper, 16 x 22.5 cm
Represented by Watters
Gallery, Sydney

Chico Monks

Centrepiece

2006, Enamel painted steel
25 x 22 x 0.5 cm
Represented by Robin Gibson
Gallery, Sydney

Malina Monks

Vase

1974, Earthenware, 16 cm high

Malina Monks

Earthenware cylinder
Earthenware, 21 cm high

Bob Parr

Excelsior

C. 1970
Wood and Trombone
156.5 x 30 cm
Represented by Watters
Gallery, Sydney

Peter Rushforth

Blossom jar

1976, Stoneware, 20 cm high

Bernard Sahn

Tall vase

1963, Stoneware, 30 cm high

Bill Samuels

Woodfired stoneware, 31.5 cm high

Guy Warren

Cargo

2003, Acrylic on canvas
65 x 80 cm

Deborah Beck

Margaret Tuckson at 90

2012, Finalist in the 2012 Portia
Geach Award



Margaret Tuckson - her life and love, a potted history

Our paths crossed, a short twenty years ago. Margaret Tuckson phoned me because she did not have the heart to throw out her many gallery invitation cards and she felt they could be a useful resource for the Abbotsleigh Art Department. We chatted over cups of tea, at her house set in the Wahroonga bush, but it was hard to concentrate on conversation with so many extraordinary eye catching artworks.

Visiting Margaret reveals the extent that art can be embedded into a person's very existence. She has surrounded herself with her own earthenware pottery, her husband Tony's impressive abstract expressionist artworks and many, much admired, pots, paintings, drawings, sculptures, and photographs. The exhibition, *Living with Art*, creates a surprisingly winning portrayal of the Tuckson family, viewed through a few of Margaret's favourite things explained through her generous sharing of stories.

Dorothea Margaret Bisset was born in 1921, shortly after her parents arrived from England. She lived in Warrawee and attended Abbotsleigh from 1935-1938.

Margaret fondly recalls her school time and the friendships that have lasted until today. From her school days she still has books of carefully observed botanical drawings and two painted timber boxes, one of which is an end of school gift from her friend Pam Graham (Marr, AOG 1938).

Margaret became a talented potter and teacher. She has memories from childhood of her mother creating interesting flower arrangements in pots that had been collected in Cairo, during her parents' sea voyage from England to Australia. These beautiful, earthy looking pots inspired the young Margaret to appreciate pottery and decide, quite early on, that she would like to know how to make them. In 1939, as soon as school finished, Margaret commenced at the East Sydney Technical College at Darlinghurst, hoping to be a potter. Before she could elect pottery as a subject Margaret was required to complete two years of Introductory Art, part of which was Design with teacher Phyllis Shillito, for which she produced her screen printed skirt. However, the escalating war meant that Margaret was

unable to continue her art study as she joined the home front war effort, commencing work in a Turramurra munitions factory run by a Swiss watchmaker who had been ordered to make aircraft instrument parts.

During the war Margaret met Tony Tuckson at her 21st birthday party in her family home in Warrawee. Margaret's parents provided holiday accommodation to the troops, initially for Australian airmen, but extended to British airmen when Margaret's English father discovered the RAF Spitfire Squadron was in Sydney. As many of Margaret's friends were at war, her mother invited the British airmen to Margaret's birthday. The family received a telegram from one guest stating he was 'pranged at Wagga, can't make the party' and it was suggested they invite Tuckson. This was the first time Margaret heard the name and initially assumed he must be American. When Margaret met Tony there was an instant connection because they both studied and shared great enthusiasm for art. In 1943 Margaret married Tony. Judy King, a school friend with whom she became very close while working at the munitions factory not only became her bridesmaid and lent her her own wedding dress so that Margaret could use her war ration coupons for other useful things, but she was also the artist who created the etching, Kosciusko Summer.

After the war the government provided a Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme for Australian Service men whose lives had been disrupted. Because Tony was British he was not eligible for this scheme. Margaret's father considered this unfair, as these soldiers had been fighting in Darwin protecting the country, and he successfully

lobbied the government to change this ruling. Tony was able to attend East Sydney Tech where he became friends with Klaus Friedeberger and Guy Warren and attended courses taught by Grace Crowley and Ralph Balson. Margaret also resumed her study there, eventually learning pottery from Mollie Douglas (another ex Abbotsleigh student) and Peter Rushforth.



From 1949 Margaret and Tony lived at Gordon, with their son Michael, and Tony painted in a studio in the attic. In 1950 Tony commenced work at the Art Gallery of NSW where he was first employed as an attendant and then worked his way up to Assistant and then Deputy Director to Hal Missingham and Peter Laverty. Margaret and Tony's enthusiasm for art led them to purchase the Ian Fairweather in 1954, from the Macquarie Galleries with their 'scarce pennies'. Tony and Margaret frequented exhibitions and when unique opportunities arose, such as the availability of the Robert Klippel in 1970, they could not resist them.

The architect Russell Jack designed a beautiful house for Margaret and Tony in the Wahroonga bush in 1962. Jack recommended a very good

bricklayer for the construction and this turned out to be Ray Coles, already a friend of the Tucksons. This Wahroonga house is the home in which Margaret spent most of her years and where she had a studio in which she created her own work and taught pottery. Margaret collected pieces by potters whose works she greatly admired – these included Aboriginal potter Thancoupie, and Bernard Sahn, Peter Rushforth, Janet Mansfield and Pam Morse. She stayed with Gwynn Hanssen Pigott in France and has a very close friendship with Malina Monks and her family.

At the Art Gallery of NSW Tony organised comprehensive exhibitions of Australian Aboriginal and Melanesian art and his views led to a reassessment of Aboriginal artwork as art rather than ethnographic artefact. Margaret accompanied Tony on trips to Melville Island in 1958 to arrange the collection of the Art Gallery's Pukamani poles and to Yirrkala in northeast Arnhem Land in 1959 to collect bark paintings that told the creation stories. Margaret was fascinated by these visits and produced invaluable photographs documenting the production and collection of the works. In Yirrkala, Tony and Margaret made friends with aboriginal artist Mawalan and his eldest son Wandjuk Marika who subsequently stayed with the Tucksons in Sydney and played their didgeridoos. Tony was also responsible for the 1966 first Australian exhibition of Melanesian art and on their Papua New Guinea trips Margaret advised Tony on significant works to be purchased for the Art Gallery of NSW collection. The trips with Tony to Papua New Guinea alerted Margaret to the incredible diversity of ceramic art and she realised that the creation and use of pots in Papua New Guinea villages

should be documented before this art disappeared. Tony employed Patricia May as assistant curator at the Art Gallery. Margaret and Patricia discovered they shared great interest in pottery and planned field trips to Papua New Guinea to build research for a book.

Since Tony's too early death in 1973 Margaret has been a positive force in ensuring he is recognised for his unique contribution to abstraction in Australia and for his leadership at the Art Gallery of NSW. Because Tony was so involved in his Art Gallery responsibilities he dedicated every spare moment at home to painting, holding only two solo exhibitions at Watters Gallery. Consequently Margaret has become the primary source of information for Tony's mainly undated and untitled artworks and she has dedicated much love and time to ensuring an accurate legacy of Tony's development as one of Australia's great abstract artists.

Margaret continued to pursue her research, completing many trips to Papua New Guinea. Sometimes she travelled with Patricia May, sometimes on her own, mostly self-funded but occasionally with a much appreciated grant. Their visits included isolated regions and nearby islands. Margaret describes an occasion in which she was travelling by canoe and could hear a hollow pounding sound and she knew, even before they sighted the village that there were potters at work. In 1982 Bay Books published *The traditional pottery of Papua New Guinea*, collaboratively authored by Margaret Tuckson and Patricia May. Their detailed research and beautiful photographs have created what is possibly the pre-eminent scholarly text on the field. The Papua New Guinea photographs taken by Margaret Tuckson over the ten years spent visiting and

researching reveal her photographic skill and sensitive observation. As Margaret did not wish to risk transporting the extremely fragile and treasured Papua New Guinea pots for this exhibition, the Grace Cossington Smith Gallery commissioned Richard Glover to photograph a few of the pots to reveal the beautiful shapes that so influenced her work.

In 2004 Margaret was awarded the Member of the Order of Australia for 'her service to the arts through the promotion of abstract expressionist art and through research into and collection of indigenous art, including the ceramic art of Papua New Guinea.'

Her life has been so active and so involved in the arts that it is with great pleasure that the Grace Cossington Smith Gallery at Abbotsleigh can honour her work and delight in her continued involvement with the School.

Mary Faith
Director, Grace Cossington Smith Gallery
2014



Casserole

Undated

Eathenware, 30 cm high

THE TRADITIONAL
POTTERY
OF
PAPUA NEW GUINEA



Patricia May & Margaret Tuckson

