



MUNDARING ARTS CENTRE PRESENTS

ABOUT TURN A QUIET, INTERRUPTED ART LIFE

A SURVEY OF WORKS BY PEGGY LYON

CURATED BY SUE STARCKEN AND CATHERINE SWIOKLO

20 OCTOBER – 19 NOVEMBER 2017

FOREWORD

About Turn: A Quiet, Interrupted Art Life is a celebration of over 35 years of arts practice by dedicated artist, environmentalist, teacher and volunteer Peggy Lyon (1945-2017). Through her unflinching curiosity and an indefatigable spirit of enquiry for materials and techniques, Peggy quietly built up a stunning range of works, many of which are held in private and public collections.

Peggy was an artist of exceptional conceptual and technical talent. Her works utilise a diversity of mediums and talk about our connections to place, family and belonging; her love of the Perth Hills and her concern and affinity for the natural environment. An artist of enormous sensibility, Peggy was an extraordinary supporter of the arts, as a teacher, curator and someone who was always willing to share her skills with her community. Never previously shown as an autonomous body of work, Mundaring Arts Centre is proud to present this survey of Peggy's work.

AUTOBIOGRAPHY

At the ages of 5, 7 and 9, three of our granddaughters sailed with their parents across the oceans from Cornwall, UK to New Zealand, limping into the safe harbour of the Bay of Islands with a broken bowsprit - legacy of a storm a few days out from land. For 14 months they had experienced life in many different places, all manner of people and other ways of doing things.

60 years earlier, post-war, my life at a comparable age had been vastly different. I was born in 1945, the last year of WWII. For a while we lived in a tin shed in my grandparents' back yard in East Perth, on an area where there are now eight upmarket apartments. The tin shed was used to house chickens before we

moved in and next to it was the cowshed, yard and vegetable garden. My grandfather was a tailor and also made his own rowboats to sail and catch fish on the river nearby.

We moved to our own home in Como when I was about 5. There was still a lot of bush around the area then. I contracted rheumatic fever and spent 4 months in Princess Margaret Hospital and a couple more convalescing, so missed the first half of Year 1 at Como Primary School. When I was 8 we moved to live in the South Perth Zoo, where my father worked. While we lived there, my sister and I rarely socialised outside school as we no longer had neighbours in the street to play with. Time at home was mostly spent playing with my younger sister, drawing, reading, sewing and riding my bike around the Zoo after-hours. My lasting memory of life back then was that it was quiet and unhurried, and I am left with the impression that there was plenty of time to do whatever I wanted. In retrospect, it was a fairly solitary and insulated life outside school, but we saw extended family regularly and I wasn't conscious of anything missing. I think a quiet life suited me just fine at that time of my life... plenty of time to think, dream and imagine.

My mother worked full-time as a self-taught commercial artist in cinema advertising in the city. At night classes she learnt life drawing and painting with Henry Froudist and did watercolour landscape painting on Saturdays at UWA. As far back as I can remember she was always drawing, and so was I. Over the years Mum became an accomplished portrait artist. At one time she was working one night a week at the Bushranger Wine Bar in Northbridge, drawing anyone who asked... good practice. She used to belong to a group of artists that met regularly to draw and when we grew up Mum stopped work and went to Curtin University (formerly WAIT) to study fine art full-time. She loved

being a student, especially as she had left school at 13 to work as her father wouldn't support any more education for her. As she was a girl, it would be wasted.

I did well at primary school, had good friends and kept my head down and worked. The best times of the week were sport, sewing lessons and art (usually last thing Friday). I learned hand sewing at school and machine sewing from Mum. I remember at 12 making a pair of shorts from one of her old dresses.

In Year 7 I won a scholarship to Perth Modern. It had a very academic focus which I enjoyed. I studied art for the 5 years of high school, came 2nd in the State in the Leaving Art exam, and intended to go to teacher's college and Perth Tech and study to be a high school art teacher. However, when all the new entrants to Claremont Teacher's College were gathered together on the lawn on Day 1, it was announced that the Education Department was looking for prospective high school Physical Education teachers who would be trained at UWA. So on the spur of the moment I changed direction, went to UWA for 3 years, plus Teachers College, and taught PE for a year and a bit before discovering I was pregnant, getting married, having a baby, staying home for 18 months, then going back to work for 3 years teaching PE at Presbyterian Ladies College.

In my late 20's we had two more children and until the youngest went to school I was a full-time mother at home doing all the usual things to keep my head above water and playing sport.

At 34, I enrolled in a course at ECU Mt Lawley (formerly Mt Lawley CAE) which had been specially developed for training primary school art specialists. It was a 2 year part-time Graduate Diploma of Art Education and had the inspiring Gareth Morse as its shining

light as well as a most interesting bunch of lecturers... David Jones, John Blakeley and Bryant McDiven among others. I did my final year thesis on *The Meaning of Craft in Contemporary Society* and interviewed some amazing practitioners around Perth... Sandra Black, David Walker and Greg Crowe being among them. I worked as an art specialist at Falls Road Primary in Lesmurdie for 10 years and a final year at Mt Helena Primary. I learned a lot about art through having to explain it to children and help them find solutions to their problems when the work wasn't going as hoped. While I was teaching I studied printmaking part-time for 4 years at Central TAFE, as well as ceramics. We had Brian McKay to teach us screen-printing, with Edgar Karabanovs and Pippa Lightfoot teaching us etching, lithograph, woodcut and linocut. In the 4th year we were expected to organise a graduate show of our final year's prints at a gallery. A fellow student and I approached Gary Tait at the Bridge Gallery in Northbridge and had a joint exhibition of prints there in 1989. I found it a challenging but useful experience.

When I finished art teaching after 11 years, our children were independent adults and all I wanted to do was learn more about art and do my own work. I had enrolled at North Metropolitan TAFE, Midland campus and learnt more about drawing and other things from Cedric Baxter and Russell Bell, textiles from Angela Leaney, and Design from Ann Cruse, in the time before the art course there changed from the Diploma of Art and Design. I was meanwhile experimenting with printing on cloth and trying to work out what I could do with it. I tentatively entered the Craft award at Darlington Arts Festival and surprisingly won. Then I entered a textile piece, *Horse Paddock, Mundaring*, in the Mundaring Shire's Open Art Acquisition exhibition and when it was acquired it gave me a big boost in confidence.

That was also the year my first grandchild was born, with whose life mine has been entwined ever since. My husband and I moved to Nannup for about 8 months at the end of that year, where I joined a local craft group and learned about patchwork from an amazing quilter who had made a stack of beautiful quilts which she thought of as her daughter's inheritance ("I have nothing else to leave her" she said).

In 1999 I had a patchwork quilt acquired by the Shire of Mundaring, *Log Jam, South-West Forests*. I was involved in the anti-clear-felling forest protests for about 5 years. I was always just quietly trying things out in the studio, especially the kind of free-screening Angela Leaney showed us at TAFE which is quite unlike the conventional disciplined screen printing on cloth where registration is crucial. I was also playing around with various ways of colouring cloth, in which I have always been interested, especially making unexpected marks or searching for a way to make marks which fit with a particular idea.

Around 2000, I joined WA Fibre and Textile Association (WAFTA) in order to learn more of what I needed and to provide exhibition opportunities. They are an excellent organisation of passionate individuals. My husband was living on the south coast that year, so I visited and sewed, lost a grandchild at birth, and always came back each time to the hills around Mundaring, knowing I was coming home. This was where I belonged.

In 2002, at 57, I enrolled in the Diploma of Environmental Art and Design at Midland College of TAFE after seeing an interesting exhibition of students' work at Mundaring Arts Centre. I was also looking for some structure in my life after my husband was accepted into the 2 year Diploma of Fine Furniture

Design at Dwellingup's School of Wood. I began part-time and graduated in 2007 with a full-time final year. It was one of the best experiences of my life! A revelation! On and off for much of my life I had been studying, teaching or practicing art and really never quite thought I had a grasp of what it was, but over time during this course of study I felt I was beginning to understand what art might be... that curious mixture of the personal and cultural at a particular moment in time. I think it was the mix of the practical and conceptual nature of the course combined with the quality of the teaching which gave me more insight.

Since 2007 I've been involved in group shows of various kinds. Although I love cloth I couldn't say it matters to me more than any other material. I have always needed variety and I could never have worked with one material or in one medium... it would feel like missing out.

One of the most fortunate things to happen to me has been my involvement with Mundaring Arts Centre over the years. As a local artist I have had tremendous support and encouragement from everyone there and many opportunities to be involved in all kinds of projects. MAC is a fine example of a community organisation that makes things happen.

Peggy Lyon, May 2016



REVIEW

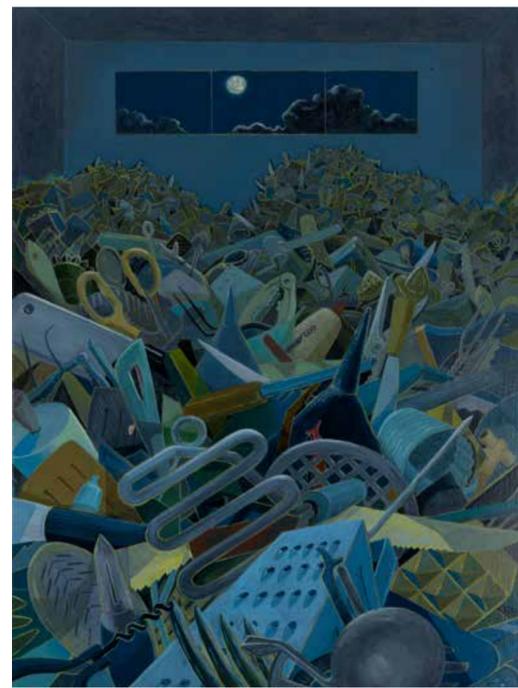
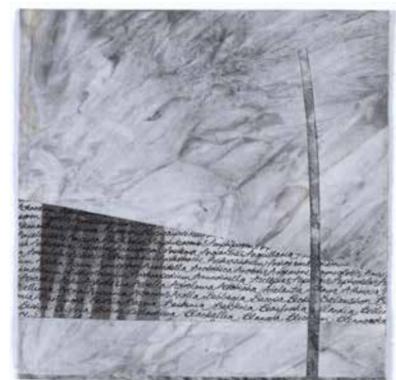
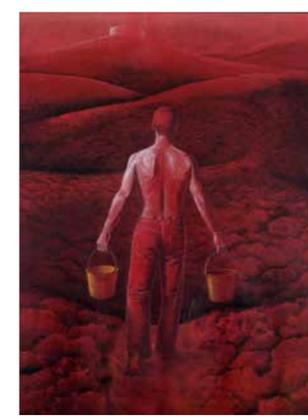
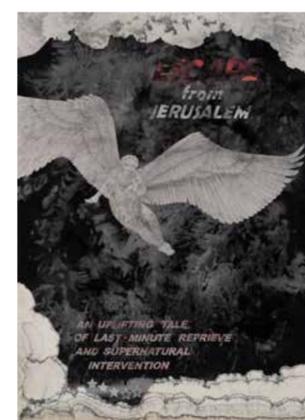
My first encounter with Peggy Lyon was as the name below a couple of textile pieces in the Shire of Mundaring Art Collection. They shared simple titles, robust stitching and clear references to the timbered nature of the Perth hills environment, but they were so distinct they could have easily been made by different hands. Their apparently uncomplicated composition and familiar subject matter were equally deceptive. Inviting a personal response from the viewer on the one hand, they seemed to retain a private connection to the artist on the other – they were beautifully accessible yet secretly complex. And, with no knowledge of the artist or her background, they proved to be among the most enigmatic artworks in the Collection.

A short time later, I had the opportunity to work with Peggy when she participated in *Mine Own Executioner*, Mundaring Arts Centre's annual self-portraiture show. Expecting the artwork she provided to be a response in textiles, I was taken aback with surprise and wonder when Peggy delivered an enormous, three dimensional, square construction. Just discernible amongst this complicated mix of reinforced concrete, metals and other industrial materials, was a series of carefully manipulated empty spaces that spelled out the word 'she'. Intricate and complicated in its use of materials and possible meaning, Peggy's artist statement provided a perfect accompaniment to this work:

"I have been thinking of my 'self' as an ongoing construction: things happen. They are felt and thought about. Days, months and years pass and memory interacts with everything. An imagined self begins to form. It is ambiguous, layered, changeable and probably always unresolvable."

Since this first exhibition, our personal and professional relationship evolved and Peggy continued to remind me that there is invariably so much more to good art than meets the eye. Great artists have an ability to live at more than one level, and their art makes visible what is often difficult to define and messy to explain. Peggy had the intelligence to know that the human heart is indeed ambiguous and often unresolvable. But she also had the courage to assail the more elusive aspects of human experience, as well as the talent and versatility to communicate her insights. Peggy's passing cannot overshadow her humanity, creativity and integrity as an artist and her art is too important to be forgotten.

Catherine Czerw, Art Matters, 2017



"I felt I was beginning to understand what art might be... that curious mixture of the personal and cultural at a particular moment in time."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Thanks also to Denise Brown, Mikaela Castledine, Catherine Czerw, Peter Dailey, Stuart Elliott, Eva Fernandez, Jenny Haynes, Beverley Iles, Pamela Mercy, David Small, Sue Starcken, Clare Stroud, Catherine Swioklo, Tricia Tarrant, Jude van der Merwe and Linda van der Merwe for donating their artworks, skills and generosity; the Shire of Mundaring, the Midland campus of North Metropolitan TAFE and the many private collectors who loaned artworks for the exhibition, and to Peggy for giving us this beautiful art and for teaching us the importance of life through art.

IMAGES

COVER

Event 5, acrylic, charcoal, pastel on paper, 2008, photographer Eva Fernandez

INSIDE

Photograph of Peggy Lyon at the Opening of *Established*, Mundaring Arts Centre, 2009

Home Theatre (detail), mixed media on paper, 2009, photographer Eva Fernandez

Family Group, lino cut 4 of 7, 1988, photographer Eva Fernandez

Saltlands: Gully, Home Paddock, Hillside (detail), textile and stitch, c. 2000, photographer Eva Fernandez

Log Jam, dyed textiles, 1999, courtesy of Shire of Mundaring Art Collection

Sanctuary for an Old Warrior, relief print, c. 1980's, photographer Eva Fernandez

Someone Else's Family (detail), acrylic on board, 2009, photographer Eva Fernandez

Untitled, pencil on paper, 2017

Domestic Arrangements (detail), acrylic on board, 2010, photographer Eva Fernandez

BACK

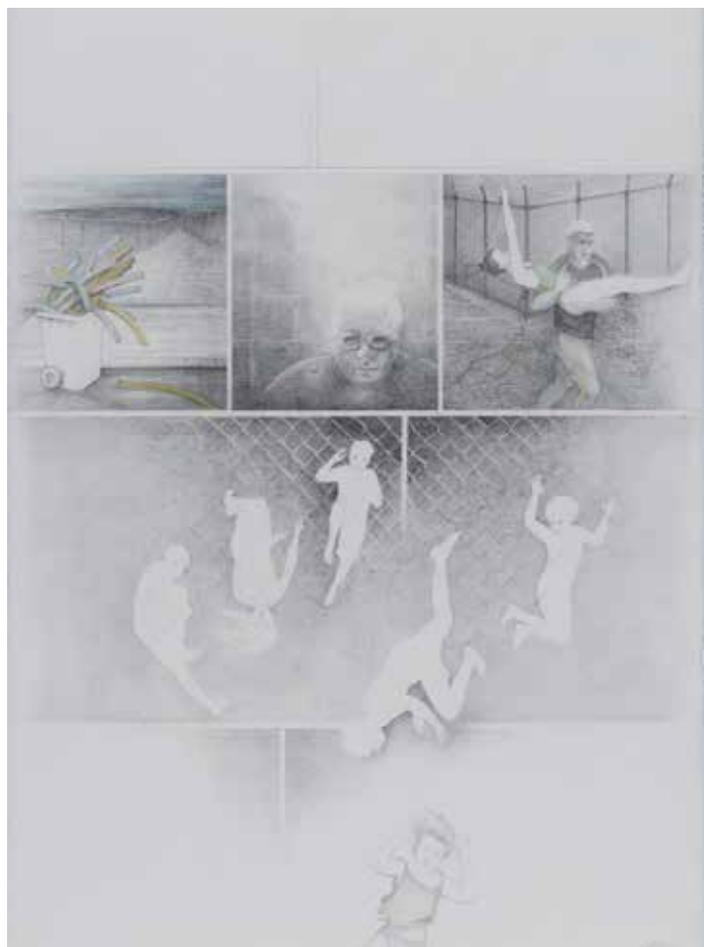
Leaving (detail), acrylic on board, 2011, photographer Eva Fernandez

Escape from Jerusalem - Stations of the Cross, charcoal, graphite, ink on paper, 2013, photographer Eva Fernandez

Shrine (detail), timber, found objects, acrylic paint, 2011, photographer Eva Fernandez

Ritual, mixed media drawing, 2011, photographer Eva Fernandez

Study for Night Moves: Bilgoman, graphite and coloured pencil on paper, 2009, photographer Eva Fernandez



OPEN TUE TO FRI 10AM - 5PM, SAT & SUN 11AM - 3PM | CLOSED MON & P/HOLS

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