

## THE DEAN'S AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN ART, DESIGN AND EDUCATION.

ROBYN GORDON

6 February 2008

This is the fifth year of the Deans Award for Excellence in Art, Design and Education, established to recognise outstanding contributions to the fields of art, design and education. This annual presentation occurs at the official opening of ARTEXPRESS@COFA at the College of Fine Arts. In 2008 this also coincides with ARTEXPRESS' 25<sup>th</sup> birthday celebrations.

I am very pleased to present this award to Robyn Gordon, Artist, Designer and Art Educator. What distinguishes Robyn's achievements and contribution to Visual Education over many years is her unique art practice which she combines with a resolute belief in the power of education to transform lives. Robyn grew up in Tamarama exploring the beach coastline. She intimately knew every rock pool from Tamarama to Mackenzies Point. It is this early love of the coastline and beach habitats that remains with her and informs her art making practice. Robyn's parents encouraged her appreciation of art and culture by taking her on many weekend outings to the 'free worlds of wonder' at museums and cultural venues in Sydney. Robyn attended Sydney Girls High School and her art teacher, Bob Winder, who became Supervisor of Art and later Director General of Education was the first to inspire her passion for art. Robyn has been associated with the many incarnations of the College of Fine Arts since the early 60s. She returned to refresh her knowledge base and pursue postgraduate study in textiles and was later to teach part time at COFA and other tertiary institutions.

In 1964 Robyn began her Art Teaching career at Picton High as the only teacher of art and music. Later in 1964 at South Sydney Boys High she taught a young Ian Howard in his final year. After teaching at Maroubra Junction Girls High, Robyn left Australia in 1966 to arrive in London at the height of the swinging 60's. Robyn taught in London doing large scale dance, drama and art projects. Like many art teachers of her generation Robyn was driven by a fervent desire to experience the great sights and collections of the world's visual culture first hand. She recalls 3 months trekking in India with her husband making pilgrimages to sites of architectural and sculptural significance capturing the moment through hundreds of slides. The initial purpose of these resources was to apply them in new and innovative art programs, however, in the longer term these have been invaluable references for her art practice across a range of studio disciplines.

Once back in Australia in 1970, the then supervisor of Art, John Debron, sent her to the School Certificate Examination Centre as one of a team of art teachers embarking on new syllabus and assessment initiatives. Robyn gained promotion at Randwick Girls High and was appointed to Head of Department at Sydney

Girls High in 1974. During her time at this school, she began taking students on field trips to Bali and Java while at the same time initiating her career as a visual artist. Robyn says that throughout her career she has “maintained contact with many of my students, high achievers among them! Both in fields specifically related to art (artists, State gallery curators, filmmakers, architects, designers), but also vets, doctors, lawyers, writers, musicians, teachers, all of whom had included visual art as an intrinsic part of their secondary education.” She also served on a number of Boards and Committees representing the interests of visual arts, while continuing as an HSC examiner for art history and practical major works.

Robyn Gordon has a distinguished second career as a visual artist with over 32 solo exhibitions and numerous group shows. In 1981 Robyn had her first big commercial art show at Macquarie Galleries with fellow Sydney Girls High art teacher Ruby Brilliant. Robyn is represented in 21 Public Collections including the National Gallery of Australia, state/regional galleries and in corporate collections including BHP, Telstra and Westmead Children’s Hospital. She has received many awards for her studio practice in jewellery, sculpture and silk screen printing. Robyn has undertaken diverse major commissions including multi media installations, bronze sculptures, jewellery, and prints. Her themes relate to nature and the environment, in particular to the sea and coast-lines. Robyn was commissioned in 1994 to design costumes and interactive sculptural sets for Dance North (North Queensland Ballet and Dance Co). The work was entitled “Please – No More Palms”, which premiered at the National Festival of Australian Theatre.

Robyn Gordon has exercised educational leadership and influence in the field through her students and their exemplary artworks, her role as an educator and as a visual arts practitioner. A consummate artist-teacher Robyn describes herself as a “creator of images and objects through which I aim to communicate with others.”

Professor Fred Hilmer, Vice-Chancellor of the University of New South Wales, Professor Gordon Stanley, President, Board of Studies New South Wales, and the assembled audience, it is my privilege to present this award to Robyn Gordon.

Professor Ian Howard  
Dean, College of Fine Arts.