

Opening Speech by Anne Flanagan, Deputy Director Art Gallery of NSW, of exhibition *Dynamic Balance* by Robyn Gordon, at Janet Clayton Gallery 18 August 2012

It is my great personal pleasure to open Robyn's exhibition here at the Janet Clayton Gallery, Sydney.

Personal, in that I have known Robyn for over 30 years when we exhibited her work back in 1982 at the Crafts Council Centre Gallery. It was a group exhibition titled *Australian Experience*. So today I want to take the opportunity of a more reflective look at Robyn's work over 30 plus years because what is so remarkable is that her practice has kept such a sustained focus over 30 years.

It is rare to see an artist's practice that celebrates the hand-made with such emblematic and highly recognisable mark making; such technical dexterity; such sustained fascination and exploration of the formal elements of pattern, colour and form that are compressed into micro environments. Micro environments that fill us with wonder.

Personal because Robyn works with objects that have their genesis in the art of jewellery - it embraces the act of giving, the object is worn, you feel it on your body - it touches you. To touch you - this infuses all that Robyn does as an artist.

Personal because the work speaks of Robyn who is vibrant, compulsive, committed. The act of adornment sits well with Robyn's generous spirit.

Personal because Robyn's work touches issues that are close to us all - her fascination with the natural world causes us to stop and look with renewed interest in the uniqueness and fragility of our environment. Robyn's eye penetrates patterns in natural world. She intrigues us with a myriad of intimate possibilities and always with flamboyance and inventiveness - the hallmarks of her practice.

Before I leave the personal I want to dwell on one of many intriguing connections - the Robyn Gordon grevillea. The Robyn Gordon grevillea is, as we all know, a flowering

plant - it is Australian, prolific, profuse and sustained. And yes, here today is the other Robyn Gordon - Australian, prolific, profuse and sustained in her art practice.

Much has been written and spoken of Robyn's passion for 'The Edge of the Sea' - to use the words of author Rachel Carson with her passion for that intertidal area that brims with life. The intertidal area that is abandoned briefly and rhythmically by the sea and is always reclaimed by the rising tide. The edge of the sea engages us all when we observe Robyn's work. Underlying the beauty of the spectacle there is meaning and significance. It is the elusiveness of meaning that seduces us and sends us again and again into the natural world.

Robyn's world is local - it is the Australian coast that has beguiled her. And so to touch on another of those strange and intriguing connections - Robyn grew up by the sea in Tamarama - in Wonderland Avenue and looked out to those big, heaving Tamarama seas that are edged by sandstone rock ledges and pools. Wonderland Avenue also wraps itself around a deep, bush gully with a waterfall. This bush gully was another wonderland that fuelled Robyn's imagination.

So too Robyn's travels - her stories of travelling are legendary - traversing the globe with curiosity and wonder. Travelling fuelled her passion for collecting - she is a forager and collector of tribal and folk pieces that have been worn and loved. Her work often weaves these collected pieces - beads and threads layering time and tradition into her work. Robyn is also a great forager and collector of the natural world that she prints, casts, copies and embeds into her work. Her studio is a like a small, natural museum where she creates a microcosm of life that she sorts, arranges and assembles.

Robyn's work is an antidote to minimalism. There are no grids, hers is not a measured, reductive process but rather an explosion of possibility. Robyn works with so many materials - polymer, metal, textile - and here today is a dazzling array of pattern and colour that shape an exotic yet intimate world. Robyn invests her work with intimacy. Her works are potent with intimacy.

These works are made by hand, each layer of polymer is coloured, rolled and flattened, to build up a dazzling surface. Metal is impressed, inked and rubbed back; fabric is imprinted and rolled into the surface; shapes are formed, torn and cast. The possibilities in each material are teased out. She is a compulsive maker whose eye and hand shape imaginary worlds. In our technology-obsessed world hers is a slow, meditative but compulsive act - of making things by hand.

The exhibition here today is titled *Dynamic Balance*. How I would like some dynamic balance in life, how the world would like dynamic balance. And here lies the connection - Robyn deals within the ecosystem and its fragility through a macro filter. She controls the uncontrollable by hand and with the repetitive act of making she controls a part of the world in balance - in this exhibition a dynamic balance.

What struck me seeing the show a few days ago was the imprint - Robyn's work appeared like a series of etching plates carrying histories on their skin. Robyn has embedded layers of stories into these works - from personal stories contained in Bruce's grandmother's lace and Robyn grandmother's ribbon that have been embedded into the surface of the forms; imprints of seeds, shells, coral - fractals of the natural world; imagined forms that are layered, shaped, coloured, gouged out, rubbed back and rolled so finely that meaning squeezes out of them.

Robyn playfully sorts and classifies these talismans and like an archaeologist she brings order to her imagined world. *Dynamic Balance* brings our personal and environmental fragility into sharp focus. It traces the ebb and flow of personal histories and natural wonders.

Thank you Robyn