



INSIDE THE GALLERY PODCAST JANUARY 2020

Transcript of interviews:

Judith Blackall – PAC Milan

Jan Goodwin, Margaret White – The Point Gallery and Craft

Robert Creed – The Gallery MOGO/CABBI

JUDITH BLACKALL – PAC MILAN

- Tim Stackpool: First let's catch up with Judith Blackall who has been involved in a very unique and prestigious exhibition of Australian artists in Italy titled Australian Antibody and Stories. It boasts of being the largest exhibition of Australian contemporary art to be presented outside of Australia. Judith is on the line to talk to us.
- Tim Stackpool: Thanks so much for joining us once again on the podcast. Thank you, Tim. Now this sounds rather exciting to be honest. All these Australian artists being shown in Italy, but can you give us an idea of how it all came together and what your involvement was?
- Judith Blackall: Right. Well, it's curated by Eugenio Viola and he's a young Italian curator who I met many years ago. He was curator at Madre, which is the Museo d'Arte Donnaregina in Naples, and he was doing a great job there, really interesting artists he was working with international artists and at a certain point, he decided he wanted to broaden his horizons. He was going well in Italy, but he took a job at PICA in Perth.
- Tim Stackpool: Oh okay.
- Judith Blackall: So he was chief curator or senior curator at the Perth contemporary art centre. And so he was there for about two years and the time he was here in Australia he was very, very active. He worked with many top artists, but he also travelled a lot and got to know a lot of really leading artists. So he since left, still in the Southern hemisphere, but he's gone to Bogota in Columbia where he's chief curator, but he still has very good contacts back in Italy.
- Judith Blackall: So he was speaking to the senior curator at PAC in Milano, which is a pack, is a Padiglione D'Arte Contemporanea, and it's the city of Milano's contemporary art space. So it's not a small space. It's been going for about 40 years. So it's got a very established reputation for showing international artists, but also solo projects. And this exhibition of contemporary art from Australia fits in with a number of exhibitions.
- Judith Blackall: Not many, but perhaps one a year or one every 18 months where they invite a curator. In this case, it's Eugenio to present an exhibition of contemporary art from a particular nation. And so this selection of 32 contemporary Australian artists is Eugenio's selection. So he's curated the project. But I lived and worked in Italy for many years. So I have also quite a few connections, but also being Australian. So I was in the good position of just being invited, first of all to write for the catalogue, but then to work with them on a number of logistical aspects. So, yeah.
- Tim Stackpool: Yes because you have a history with the museum of contemporary art in Sydney and also with the National Art School.

Judith Blackall: Exactly. Yeah, that's right. And so no, I know all the artists. So I was able to negotiate and talk to them and at least I'm in the same time zone.

Tim Stackpool: Who were the artists? Give us a rundown.

Judith Blackall: It's a great lineup. Well, I'll tell you some of them or all of them really. So Vernon Ah Kee, so Tony Albert, they're in alphabetical order. Khadim Ali, Brook Andrew, Richard Bell, Daniel Boyd, Maria Fernanda Cardoso, Barbara Cleveland, the artist group from Sydney, Destiny Deacon, Hayden Fowler.

Tim Stackpool: Oh yes.

Judith Blackall: Marco Fusinato, and Marco has been selected to represent Australia at Venice. The Venice Biennale in two years' time.

Judith Blackall: Agatha Gothe-Snape from Sydney. Julie Gough from Tasmania. Fiona Hall also from Tasmania who represented Australia. When was that? 2015 I think in Venice. Dale Harding from Queensland. Nicholas Mangan, Angelica Mesiti who represented Australia this year. So quite a few of the artists already have international connections.

Judith Blackall: Archie Moore.

Tim Stackpool: And how long is this list Judith?

Judith Blackall: We're halfway through.

Tim Stackpool: Keep going, keep going.

Judith Blackall: I'll keep going. Callum Morton from Melbourne. Tom Nicholson also from Melbourne. Jill Orr, performance artist, sort of a veteran. Mike Parr as well. Patricia Piccinini, Stuart Ringholt, Khaled Sabsabi, Yhonnie Scarce, Soda_Jerk, Christian Thompson, James Tylor, Judy Watson, Jason Wing, and Nyapanyapa Yunupingu. So that's 32.

Tim Stackpool: It's very diverse.

Judith Blackall: Yes, it is very diverse. Eugenio wasn't interested in a theme or a statement about Australian art. I mean I think that's very difficult. But he is interested in political standpoints and 15 of these 32 artists are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. So there's a very strong political stance from an indigenous perspective. And it's very interesting because artists like Brook Andrew who are working in other fields, Brook Andrew is the next director of the Sydney Biennale this year.

Judith Blackall: So a lot of high profile artists and they've all contributed beautiful works like excellent, outstanding, major, major pieces. And some of them came and did

site specific works in the spaces. So that was interesting and they couldn't invite everyone, which was a kind of a pity, but about 10 artists came to Milan for the opening and got to know some of the artists in Milan and got to know a bit the scene in Milan. So that was good.

Tim Stackpool: And you of course went over there. How well was it received by those who appreciate art in Europe?

Judith Blackall: Well it seemed very well received. Lots of people at the opening, the opening had, Mike Parr did one of his recent performances where he painted blind, he closed his eyes and for about 40 minutes he painted an untitled black square right in the first space of the exhibition. And it was good. Really well attended. And Milan's audiences are very...

Judith Blackall: They're not like Australian audiences. In fact, they're polite and no one was talking. Everyone was very attentive and quiet during the whole performance. And so that was very, very good. Lots of press as well. There was a press conference that morning and Eugenio spoke.

Judith Blackall: Then following that, a lot of press in the local and national papers. And just recently, Stuart Ringholt has been there and he's done a number of his performances. He did two anger workshops and then one of his naturist tours of the exhibition.

Tim Stackpool: Yes. Familiar with those, getting your kit off and walking around the gallery.

Judith Blackall: Exactly. Led by the artist also naked. And it's very cold in Milan. I'm a bit worried because I hope they ramped up the central heating.

Tim Stackpool: The air conditioning, of course. Now on the larger scope of this, when you get artists, so many artists from Australia in an exhibition in a place such as Milan. What does that do in terms of carrying on the acceptance or the respect of art and Australian artists over there in Europe?

Judith Blackall: That's an interesting question. I think as a sort of a global phenomenon, I don't think works that people will say, "Woo-hoo, Australian art, great." I think audiences in Milan will be looking at individual practices, individual artists' work because as a whole you couldn't sort of say this is fabulous new direction. There are strong points all the way through it and it does actually take a lot of work to get into those.

Judith Blackall: And they published a very good education guide. So there's a 32-page little booklet that you get when you come in, which explains all the assets. If that's too much to read while you're going around, you can take it home. So there does need to be those kinds of ways to understand what's going on here in Australia through these works.

Judith Blackall: I mean, I just feel like I think Angelica Mesiti already have... They're well known in Europe. Angelica now lives in Paris. And so I was just like, they're already kind of active in the international scene. Soda_Jerk as well. They live in New York.

Tim Stackpool: Like I said earlier, it's so diverse, the range of artists there and their work is so diverse. You wouldn't have an individual going in there and saying, "Oh that's such a typical Australian piece of work."

Judith Blackall: Not at all.

Tim Stackpool: Because there wouldn't be any such thing in that collection.

Judith Blackall: No, that's absolutely true. And that's one of the strengths of the selection of artists. They're really exploring many, many different facets of contemporary Australian life. So for example, artists who have arrived here as refugees, like Khadim Ali or Khaled Sabsabi who are exploring in a very different middle Eastern perspective, along with the Aboriginal artists, the artists from Queensland or from Tasmania, or South Australia, they're really, really add such a diversity of points of view and perspectives and approaches.

Judith Blackall: Then there are the history of contemporary Australian now with artists who have been working in the field for all their lives, like Mike Parr and Jill Orr. And very nice thing happened through this process in that Mike Parr and Dale Harding have started a conversation around what they would be doing. Mike Parr has two early photographs of him in the Australian landscape in the 70s so he would've been 32 or something.

Judith Blackall: Dale Harding at that point, wasn't even born. But Dale has been researching a lot of his ancestral country, which is around Carnarvon Gorge. And he recognized from the landscape in Mike Parr's photographs that this was around Carnarvon Gorge and there's a picture there of Mike, it's quite a famous series. He takes some burnt charcoal from a burnt tree there in the landscape and he marks his ribs so he draws on his body.

Judith Blackall: And so it's a documented performance really for the camera in the landscape. So Dale said, "Well that's my country that you're doing that on. Let's talk about this, and what that means." And so it was a very gentle, in Mike's words, a gentle conversation unfolded. And then Dale also did a site specific wall painting, which referenced Mike's work but also referenced his own strong connections to country and yeah.

Judith Blackall: And so that was a good outcome between artists across generations as well and intercultural.

Tim Stackpool: Yeah, exciting stuff.

Judith Blackall: Yeah, it's good. And a big thank you to all the artists and the galleries who very strongly participated.

Tim Stackpool: Yes. And thanks to you too. I mean, it's part of your advocacy and I guess your ambassadorship of being involved in art in Australia of course helps us take that to the world. So it's very much appreciated. Now before we finish up though, I just want to mention very shortly in the podcast we're going to talk to a number of galleries who have been affected by fires over the last few months, weeks. You have a place, a property you own in the Shoalhaven as well. How are things going with you?

Judith Blackall: Well, it's worrying. So a lot of this summer, we've been scanning the horizon each morning, and right now I'm at the window looking out and everything's very still, it's very smoky again. We had some rain, which is fantastic. We thought, "Oh well now we can move on. Everything's wet," but it's very hot this morning or today it was hot. Now there are little bits of ash pose floating down again, so we're again on the alert and it's worrying.

Judith Blackall: It's just the smell of smoke in the air, just all those anxieties resurface and so we start thinking about packing bags and putting around buckets. We don't have enough to be able to defend the place here, but we are opposite of beautiful big stand of trees between us and the beach. So it's a little bit vulnerable.

Tim Stackpool: Okay, well look, we're wishing you all the very best to you then and always lovely to speak to you on the podcast. I think it was actually a year ago this month that we spoke to you about the Arthur Boyd traveling exhibition. So always beautiful to catch up with you, Judith, and good luck with everything throughout the year.

Judith Blackall: Thank you, Tim. We'll speak again soon, I hope.

Tim Stackpool: Yes, definitely. I hope so too. Judith Blackall there, telling us about a most extensive exhibition of Australian artists in Milan.

JAN GOODWIN, MARGARET WHITE – THE POINT GALLERY & CRAFT – GREENWELL POINT

Tim Stackpool: First of all, the Point Gallery and Craft in Greenwell Point, it's governed by a local committee where Jan Goodwin is the current president and Margaret White is a secretary. I took the opportunity to ask Margaret first of all about the history of the gallery.

Margaret White: In 2008 there was a group of crafters that were meeting down at the local Caravan Park. There were several women from that group who decided that there was enough craft and art being made within Greenwell Point to actually try and put it on the marketplace. We got a little grant from the community group that was already here and commenced here on the 8th of August in 2008.

Tim Stackpool: Now, opening a gallery is a tough at any time, but of course in the current economic climate it can be even more difficult. How do you guys keep the money coming in? Is it continually looking for grants? How has your rental situation here? How does all that work?

Margaret White: Well, we don't make a lot of money here. We cover our expenses. We look at it from the point of view that whatever we sell, we take a commission and the balance goes back into the community with the styles that the people make. As long as we cover our costs, we don't make a lot of profit. That's what it boils down to.

Tim Stackpool: Yes. Well, you have set yourself up, you do have a committee. In terms of whose art you carry, how do you determine that?

Margaret White: That is via the process of we have people who want to come into the gallery. We only have a certain number of people, or should I say members, who can actually put an item into the gallery. We have what would you call it Jan?

Jan Goodwin: We have a small limit on every craft that comes into the gallery. We might have 20 crafts here, but we have three in each of those crafts. We don't get X amount of craft within that group. We've got painting, knitting, pottery...

Margaret White: Leather work.

Jan Goodwin: ...Leather work, wood work.

Tim Stackpool: In terms of you operating as a committee and always dealing with an artistic temperament amongst those who supply for you? How challenging does it get? All you guys are volunteers. Are there times when you think it's all getting too hard, we need to lock down our regulations? Do you suffer from that as well in this little community that you have?

Margaret White: Yes, we do. We do have that situation occasionally where it doesn't suit the person that's wants to come in and we've simply got to say, well, there's our bylaws. That's our constitution. If you read through that, if that doesn't suit you, then we can't help you. That doesn't happen very often, but we do have to follow our bylaws, and every so often we'll come across a situation where we need to amend those bylaws to cater to a certain area that we've not come across before.

Tim Stackpool: Now, one of the reasons why I wanted to have a chat with you particularly is because of what has been happening down here in the Shoalhaven in the news recently with the Bush fires coming through and the threats from that. Directly, the town of Greenville Point hasn't been affected apart from the fact that tourists were asked to leave, to evacuate essentially because the risk was so high. Now, as you said, you don't have a great turnover anyway, with tourists being asked to leave the town because of the bushfire threat, the opportunity to sell is even less. In terms of not just your gallery, but in terms of the community, this must have a significant effect on you guys.

Margaret White: It has had an effect. We've had to close our doors, possibly not because there weren't any people in town, but also because of the actual threat that was here. We didn't know whether we were safe. There was a lot of members in town who didn't want to leave their homes to sit up here and maybe be at risk. That had its effect on the gallery because we're all volunteers. As far as the number of people came through town, it was like a ghost town. It really was like it goes down. You could fire a bullet and not hit anybody.

Tim Stackpool: Galleries such as this, offer opportunities for artists who perhaps may not have the opportunity to show anywhere else. If someone was interested in bringing some of their work into your gallery, how do people go about doing that?

Margaret White: We have what we call an exhibition wall, which is a for hire. It's the first wall as you walk in on the right-hand side. They can have that for as long as they like and they pay a fee for that and in their pay, a commission on any sales. We're very open to exhibitions of all manner, not just artwork.

Tim Stackpool: Well, great accessibility and you have a lovely gallery here. It's always lovely to come and visit you guys whenever we're down this way. Jan and Margaret, thank you so much for your time on inside the gallery.

Tim Stackpool: Margaret White and Jan Goodwin there from the Point Gallery and Craft in Greenwell Point mainly affected by the lack of visitors to the area because of the proximity of the fires.

ROBERT CREED – THE GALLERY MOGO

- Tim Stackpool: What about those galleries at ground zero? The holiday destination of Batemans Bay has been shattered by the bushfires and the lack of tourists over the holiday period and the gallery in Mogo to the South is similarly affected. Robert Creed is the current president of the cooperative Creative Arts Batemans Bay Incorporated, better known as CABBI, which operates the gallery. Robert, thanks for taking the time to join us on the podcast.
- Robert Creed: No problem.
- Tim Stackpool: First of all, can you let us know what it is that your gallery or your organization does and the type of artists whose work we can see in your space?
- Robert Creed: It's actually quite extensive, and it cuts across lots of different media and goes into craft, which is one of the most successful areas that we've gone into. We've been around for 35 years and to be quite honest, it's had a very narrow definition of visual arts, which is more traditionally based, but that's changed over the last 12 months and we have now expanded that into what most people would understand to be a current definition of visual arts to include digital art and photography, et cetera.
- Tim Stackpool: If you look at people's responses and comments on Facebook and on Google, a lot of people are very surprised when they first walk in to the space and the gallery and go, "How did we not know this was here? This was the best stop on our entire trip." Do you get a lot of that reaction?
- Robert Creed: We do. We've been around a long time. Ken Taber started this together with Betty Griffiths, and Eunice Cole call way back with the first meeting in 1984, so it's been building a lot of my momentum, changing location and it's been at Mogo now for the gallery there for the last 20 years. So it's very well established and our exhibition, our yearly exhibition, which we've just finished, has been very well received over the years and that's usually judged and usually about 10 categories, cutting across vinyls, mixed medias, digital art, oil painting, the whole gamut.
- Tim Stackpool: Now, of course the reason why there's such a focus on you guys at the moment is because you've been surrounded by bushfires. Of course we're only halfway through the bushfire season, through summer. How did that affect you guys? We saw pictures of even the zoo down there being surrounded by flames, giraffes surrounded by flames. But in terms of artists down there, in terms of your gallery in the town, how did you guys find that? How did you guys survive?
- Robert Creed: Well, very nervously. A lot of our members were totally devastated, lost everything. We were lucky at Mogo. About 30 to 40% of Mogo was destroyed, but we were down the Southern end, so the was still intact, and we're now back

and operating again because the power's back on. So business as usual and people have been fantastic and they've been rolling up to support the community down there. That's been really edifying. We had to close the exhibition here. Our exhibition usually has about 250 odd paintings, and it's usually very well attended from people from Canberra. But this year we opened it for the first time on the foreshore in the bay, and opened it before Christmas and it was going quite well until the fire started to take hold and we basically had to shut it down because we had members that were rostered on that were being evacuated two or three times.

Tim Stackpool: Yeah, it's almost unbelievable, isn't it? We know how these sort of events affect entire communities, but when you narrow it down and you think, "Well, how is this going to affect an art gallery? How is this going to affect artists?" But really it comes down to the fact, "Well, my property is at risk and I have to take care of it, so everything else gets pushed into the background. My craft is not important anymore."

Robert Creed: No, that's right. People's safety is number one priority, and whenever you're doing a non-profit organization like us, I always say, it's got to work for you personally. During the fire emergencies, all the members gathered round and we just looked after one another as went through. People stayed in one another's places as various people were evacuated. A lot of people just stepped up during that time, which was really good.

Tim Stackpool: The great difficulty is of course getting people back into the area and as soon as the Shoalhaven area was cleared for visitors, I certainly went down there, I took the family down there. We spoke to some people at Greenwell Point earlier in this podcast. But in terms of what you're seeing down there, do you think it will take a while for the tourist to return? I did understand that some businesses were saying, "Well, we might as well pack up and close up until Easter." Is that the feeling that's down there or have I got it wrong?

Robert Creed: Well it's kind of changed a bit. Again, because of literally the international coverage that the South Coast has got, a lot of people have done exactly what you did, have come back down to the coast. It's certainly been observed over the last couple of weeks, an increase in the number of visitations down here, there's no doubt about that. And generally over the last year, prior to the fires, the visitations were up on last year, so things were kind of heading in the right direction. Our primary concern I think is once we get through the next couple of months and the recovery starts to get in, I think it's most probably likely that you'll see the visitation drop off, and certainly after Easter it might get back to normal visitor profiles for the year.

Tim Stackpool: In terms of what art brings to communities such as yours, and there's a great comradery that's created amongst artists who are exhibiting together, if there had been a loss of your venue, how devastating would that have been just in terms of the sense of community that you guys have there?

Robert Creed: Oh, that would have been devastating. We had 55 artists involved, 220 painting, lots of arts and crafts. So if people lost all that, it would have been devastating. But because we were right on the foreshore this year, we were very lucky, although a lot of members' houses were totally impacted, or just the nervous stress of having to evacuate three times over a period of three or four weeks.

Tim Stackpool: So it's always top of mind, unfortunately.

Robert Creed: Absolutely. Yep.

Tim Stackpool: And that's the reason why we're in touch, because it's a matter of, of supporting, of giving a level of support as much as we can. There's thoughts and prayers all the time, but it's all about getting people down to visit you or across to visit you once again. And we're not just talking about the Southern parts of New South Wales here, we're talking about right across the country, wherever artists may be affected by the current situation.

Robert Creed: Well, I think the creative community is the glue in many ways that bonds it all together, and that's certainly come to the fore over the break. To the extent that we... We had to close the exhibition a couple of times because we had no power, then we closed at a week early because of the situation. But we're a re-opening and just having a pop up artisan's market as another attempt to try and just bring people together and again, all the proceeds will go to the rural fire services. That's kind of the way that we're dealing with it at the moment. But we've just had a committee meeting yesterday and we're looking at longer term strategies. We just had an approach from a PhotoAccess in Canberra and they want to do a photographic exhibition using people's photographs of what they experienced in the fires, possibly in the June weekend. So there's lots of other organizations that we're talking with to try and bring this to the fore and work out ways we can help people in a more meaningful way.

Tim Stackpool: Robert, look, I wish you all the very best. It's lovely for you to take the time to speak to us even though front of mind, back of mind, you're still thinking about the fire threat, which is around you and really appreciate your time on the podcast.

Robert Creed: Not a problem. Thanks a lot, Tim.

Tim Stackpool: Robert Creed there from CABBI, Creative Arts Batemans Bay Incorporated, talking about how their local arts cooperative and the Mogo community has been affected by recent bushfires.