

**Celebrating 25 Years of Warringah Printmakers Studio
Manly Art Gallery & Museum**

2pm Saturday 16th September 2023

Transcript of speech given by Sandra Williams, WPS past President

Good afternoon, everybody. For those who don't know me, I will briefly outline my background so that you are not wondering why I have been asked to talk today. I was on the Studio's committee continuously for over twenty years (1997 - 2019) and during that time, I held the official positions of Secretary, Treasurer and President. The unofficial positions included website maintenance and design as well as anything that needed doing, including exhibition organisation, classes and workshops, purchasing, newsletter and even maintenance and cleaning. I was also a keen archivist and digitised early handwritten minutes and old newsletters, giving me an insight into the early history of the studio.

I'm going to start a slide show now which will play in the background while I'm speaking. I've picked some photos at random and I'm not going to talk to the photographs but they show various committee members, teachers, those who have helped at exhibitions & clean ups & the interior of the studio with the changes in storage and equipment over the years. As well, the slide show will give a feeling of time passing and hasn't it passed? It is hard to believe that 25 years and some months have passed since Incorporation and 40 years, this year, since Paul Smith played a pivotal role in the founding of the Warringah Community Print Workshop.

It was in 1983 that Paul, (a printmaker and artist who collaborated with some of Australia's most prestigious artists) set up the Warringah Community Print Workshop. Paul not only devised the concept, physically transformed and equipped the space, but also set up a teaching and access programme.

It wasn't until July 1984, however, that the Shire President at the time, Cr. Darren Jones, officially launched the Warringah Print Workshop Project in its first home - the old Scout Hall behind the Manly Vale Community Centre (maybe behind Passmore Reserve?) It was in this year that Joan Hartmann joined as the first student of Paul Smith, later to take over as teacher and I think there are still some members here today who had some of their first printmaking experiences with Joan.

The Workshop then moved to the Tramshed at Narrabeen while awaiting a renovation of the old garage on the corner of Condamine and Lovett Streets. This renovation was enabled by a Commonwealth Employment grant. A further special, one-off \$1000 grant was received from the NSW Ministry of the Arts, providing several print specific features for the front room (the present location of the studio).

In 1986, the Warringah Shire Council adopted a decision to constitute a committee under Section 530A of the Local Government Act. Consequently, the first management committee was formed for the Warringah Print Workshop and this committee requested that Paul Smith be employed as coordinator of the workshop to run classes and organise other courses. Paul was subsequently provided with a small retainer for 12 months as Print Workshop Coordinator with another one-off grant of \$5,500 from the NSW Ministry of the Arts. Joan Hartmann did much to help the centre progress. She was helped by Anthea Boesenberg (and we need to thank them both for their early work).

In 1987, Paul Smith's 12 months as coordinator ended and he joined the committee as Chairman. Towards the end of 1988, he finished teaching and Joan Hartmann took over his classes. (This seems to be a recurring pattern. Most of our present teachers were students at some time and showed a special aptitude for sharing their skills.)

Perhaps the most important change came when, in October 1997, and acting on the advice of the Warringah Council, the Warringah Print Workshop became an incorporated body and changed its name to the Warringah Printmakers Studio Inc. Many things were necessarily formalised for the change to a not-for-profit incorporated body – we had to write a constitution; it was necessary to organise insurance and administration. The organisation of membership, access, classes, and workshops needed to be agreed upon. The number of printmakers using the studio also continued to grow. In fact, the organisation was one of a kind and not only in the local area and we became the go-to studio for advice on how to set up a community printmaking facility.

This 'reknown' was helped by two events - the first was the introduction of safer, alternative practices in 1997 with the assistance of a grant from Warringah Council. Workshops given by visiting printmakers, introduced the Studio to techniques which were less toxic. In 1997, Keith Howard from Canada, gave instruction on using the photopolymer film, called Imagon, which could be laminated to copper plate and 'developed' with a mix of soda ash and water. He also provided us with the Olec light exposure unit and showed us how to use ferric chloride to etch copper (in fact, I think he also was responsible for the vertical tank still used today).

Pauline Muir from Adelaide in 1998 and Dan Weldon from the USA in 1999, showed us how to use photopolymer plates, which is still popular with our members today. Other workshops by artists Janet Ayliffe and Diane Longley, both from South Australia, have increased the store of knowledge of multiple plate photopolymer and digital manipulation.

The second event which helped us become better known in both Australia and world-wide came in 2001 with the completion of the Studio website, again made possible with a Community Access Grant from Warringah Council. The website was informative and accessed by Studio members and the general arts community.

Over the years we have engaged in many exciting projects some of which have been initiated by us and others by local, national and international printmaking groups and galleries.

As well as our Annual Exhibitions, which have been ongoing since 1985, and celebrate the past year in printmaking at our studio, smaller themed exhibitions, designed to challenge our membership, are organised when opportunity, time and funding allow. We have contributed to community exhibitions such as Warringah Council's Art Exhibition, Mosman Gallery's Art Fair and Manly Art Gallery's Art Festival by arranging satellite exhibitions and demonstrations of printmaking techniques.

The PrintSafe exhibition in 2003, was a big event, organised by the Warringah Printmakers (mainly thanks to Anthea and the many overseas contacts she made). It focused on safer printmaking techniques and included work by local and international artists such as Dan Weldon, Nik Seminoff, Mikael Khilman, Jennifer Page, Ad Stijnman and Roslyn Kean and was opened by the artist Cherie Hood.

Exhibitions and/or exchanges, have been held in Montreal, with the Miniare Exhibition (later shown at Manly Gallery); in Sweden, with the Akersberga printmakers; in Quebec, with the Ateliers Le Zocalo and Circulaire; in the USA when Australian prints were showcased by the North-West Print Council; in Ireland with the Inside the Square exhibition; in Hong Kong when community printmaking studios were gathered together for an exhibition; and twice in China with the exhibitions Australia – Enchanting Impressions and Through Australian Eyes. The cultural exchange with China continued in 2005 with a visit to Sydney by Professor Zheng Shuang who gave demonstrations of Chinese woodblock printing at the Sydney Art on Paper Fair as well as at the Studio in Manly Vale. The Professor also visited two of our artists' studios – that of Joan Hartmann and Helen Clare - who showed their prints and print practices to the Chinese contingent.

We've collaborated to produce the exhibitions, such as, Reel Heroes – Safe Beaches and Changing Climates with printmakers from Western Australia, South Australia, Brisbane, Victoria, Tasmania, and various NSW regional areas. We've hosted Programmes for Reconciliation. Women artists from Ernabella came to Sydney and attended the Studio with the view to enabling the exchange of ideas, techniques, language and customs between Aboriginal desert artists and urban Sydney artists. Helen Clare visited the community of Ernabella and gave a workshop on monotypes. Students from Biala Aboriginal Hostel came to the Studio for classes in the same reconciliation programme.

We hosted a project initiated by Warringah Council, whereby some of our artists worked with women from Darlington, who were in the Aboriginal Women's Art Therapy Group called Connections. Prints were produced and exhibited as part of the 2006 Gu-ring-ai Festival.

We've had two artists doing residencies, Jan Melville in Ireland and Rebecca Baird in Sydney Nolan's old studio in the UK. Susan Baran had a workshop at La Residence in Spain.

Our regional galleries have also shown great support. Mosman Gallery with the exhibition From Ocean to Harbour, and I especially thank the MAG&M (particularly Katherine Roberts who has always been enthusiastic and supportive and also Bronwen Davies who organised today's event.) Spaces in the exhibition programme have been made for us in an already busy list of exhibitions. Starting with the BIG exhibition, then the Leave Nothing but Prints exhibition and also the Artists Book Launch and the exhibition of Natural Selection. It has even found time to fit in this celebration of 25 years.

In summary, our studio has moved beyond the mere "survival" of the early years and is now flourishing as an important printmaking facility. Congratulations Warringah Printmakers Studio on facilitating a quarter of a century of printmaking for so many people and congratulations to all the volunteers "who made it so"!