

# The South Australian School of Art History Project Report October 2010

My last reports in August and September outlined a number of significant developments for The South Australian School of Art History Project. These included:

1. A detailed application to the History Trust of South Australia for funds towards the writing up of research into the book, *The Stanley Street Years 1963-1978* in 2011. Although this Trust is a small fund with a very competitive field of applicants, the writing of the report nevertheless allowed a useful opportunity to reflect on our achievements to date, to compile a 'dossier' of information towards future grant applications, and notwithstanding 3 full days required to complete the application, the palpable realisation that we have achieved much, given negligible funds and a huge amount of voluntary work.

Unlike planning for exhibitions and other events, the work of serious academic research and writing tends to remain invisible until tangible outcomes are published. Even with funding, such projects, therefore, require long-term commitment and we are fortunate in securing the appointment of Dr Jenny Aland PSM as Adjunct Research Fellow in Art, Architecture & Design at UniSA to, among other research duties, undertake much of the research towards future South Australian School of Art History Project publications. Jenny has now 'unearthed', a surprisingly large amount of exciting research, much of which was considered lost throughout various re-locations of the South Australian School of Art over the past four decades.

2. Growing visibility of the work of The South Australian School of Art History Project through the School and Friends of SASA websites and newsletters which feature 'Snapshots' of past staff and students and regular reports and articles of interest. These items include publication of the catalogue from the recent exhibition/presentation, *A White Glove Event* at the Art Gallery of South Australia. Even the more contemporary Friends of SASA events which raise funds for the SASA History Project, such as *Geoff on the Couch* and *An Evening with Anne Newmarch* represent to a large extent examples of 'living' history projects.



Last month, a major milestone was achieved for The South Australian School of Art History Project when *A White Glove Event* was presented at the Art Gallery of South Australia on Friday October 22, 2-4pm. This occasion was widely advertised as:

*...a unique opportunity to view rarely seen works on paper from the collection of the Art Gallery of South Australia made by artists who were staff or students at The South Australian School of Art during the first hundred years of its existence (1861 to 1961).*

*The White Glove Event will be hosted by **Maria Zagala**, Associate Curator, Prints Drawings and Photographs at the Art Gallery of South Australia, **Dr Jenny Aland** and **Dr Pamela Zeplin** from Art, Architecture & Design at the University of South Australia. Wearing curators' 'white gloves', the three presenters will discuss original prints, drawings and watercolours by artists including Ethel Barringer, Dorrit Black, Dora Chapman (Cant), Harry Pelling Gill, Frederick Milward Grey, Barbara*

*Hanrahan, Mary Packer Harris, Ivor Hele, Jacqueline Hick, Margaret Preston, George Reynolds, Udo Sellbach, Karin Schepers, Brian Seidel and Marie Tuck. (White Glove Event advertising brochure)*

Conceived as a fund raising event for the SASA History Project (its inspiration occurring during Jenny Aland's hospital stay last year), the event proved to be, from all reports received to date, a very special occasion. Feedback was spontaneous and enthusiastic, as participants inspected, marvelled at and reminisced over these most important of all research documents - in the form of over 40 prints, watercolours and drawings.

Many of the 25 people attending overwhelmingly testified to the privilege of viewing these largely unseen treasures from the School of Art - at close up and personal range. After introductions to the History Project and the *White Glove Event* by myself, and the Art Gallery's *Prints Drawings and Photographs* collection by Maria Jenny took on the breathtaking task of presenting each work in less than an hour and a half, with additional commentary from Maria and myself. This was interspersed with participants' comments and delighted - and mostly delightful - recollections of a number of the artists represented. It was followed by animated discussion over afternoon tea (acknowledgements to Friends of SASA: Jack Condous, Bente Andermahr and Bill Morrow).



This event represented the culmination of many hours spent by the three presenters in selecting the work (first hand in the collections room) over a number of weeks. This was a very special privilege and we are grateful to Maria for all the patient work this has involved in accessing, identifying and organising each specific work. Maria was most supportive of the project, generously indulging us with her time and utter professionalism. Many more laborious hours were spent by Jenny in organising images, copyrights and function arrangements, not to mention the many months of her previous research through myriads of 'lost' documents. We worked closely together, writing and editing the final text, refining Jenny's catalogue design, desk-top publishing and printing the catalogues (acknowledgements to AAD, UniSA). Through this process, Friends of SASA has now become a publisher with its own ISBN (International Standard Book Number) identity.

*A White Glove Event* was an artistic and public relations success, not only for the school's prestigious contribution to the local culture and the Art Gallery's foresighted collections policy, but as well for the history of South Australian art itself. This small event managed, with its 40 plus works, to augment and in some cases to challenge some previous cultural assumptions about art produced in this state. This was particularly evident in late nineteenth century work by Harry Pelling Gill and George Reynolds which revealed sympathetic renderings of Kaurna Aborigines and their local environment, as well as early work by Barbara Hanrahan that reveals surprising influences not always apparent in her body of later work.



With valuable information and reminiscences being spontaneously being offered by excited participants and no way of recording these in the heat of the moment, we have sent follow up emails to request some of these reflections in writing, as well as specific feedback on the event. One participant, Dr. Avis Smith commented: '*...a great event and of considerable historic value*'. Avis has subsequently written an item on *A White Glove Event* for the Royal South Australian Society of Artists newsletter, *Kalori*. Another member of the audience, Anne Leech, remembered her time at Stanley Street in the 1960s:

*Dora Chapman scared the wits out of me, especially as Life Drawing was a subject where one's work was up on a board for all the world to see!!!*

*Dave Dallwitz was another story. Gentle lovely man who quietly talked away with that twinkle in his eye. Lettering classes could have been dry and boring but once one had learned the basics he encouraged creativity with both the style, shape and layout of the letters. Remember this was all hand done (to perfection). From the pieces I still have it appears we mainly used gouache and as a country soul living off the smell of an oily rag those tubes of colour seemed VERY expensive - even at the SASA shop ... I loved the place, four days a week there where we could be ourselves and be treated like adults then Fridays at Teacher's College where we had to wear stockings and feel like Primary Schoolers!!*



While the actual figures in terms of funding raised by *A White Glove Event* are yet to be finalised, it is expected to realise a modest profit, without taking into account the time involved in planning, writing and presenting. We had planned for an audience of 40, due to the Art Gallery of South Australia's significant hire/function costs (which were offset with Friends supplying wine and some refreshments) but the 25 who attended constituted an ideal audience size in terms of interaction and access to the works.

It should be noted that the *White Glove Event* took place within a suite of Friends of SASA workshops (4) within a matter of weeks and feedback suggests that this competition affected numbers for at least three workshops. It was a good idea to offer free 'rush' tickets to SASA students and the third year visual arts student who took advantage of this offer was subsequently inspired by the event to go on to study art history/theory at Honours level.



We are aware that the energetic and positive work of the Friends continues apace - and even though the scope of this sometimes diversifies it is imperative to keep in mind the original charter of the Friends; to support and fund The South Australian School of Art History Project.



In closing, I wish to again thank all those Friends and History Project members, Art Gallery staff and the school of Art, Architecture & Design, and of course Jenny and Maria, who/which have made this small project such a great success, whether through in-kind support, research, organisation, donation, or attendance.

**Dr Pamela J Zeplin**  
*Chair/Convenor, South Australian School of Art History Project Committee*  
*November 5 2010*