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VICTORIAN TAPESTRY WORKSHOP NEWSLETTER  
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Victorian  
**Tapestry Workshop**

## Our cover

**Yvonne Todd – Alice Bayke**

Weavers: Sue Batten and Amy Cornall

The tapestry *Alice Bayke*, commissioned by Queensland Art Gallery, is based on a photograph which is part of a series by New Zealand photographic artist Yvonne Todd called *Sea of tranquility*. It was inspired by the startling, doll-like maquillage of Priscilla Presley when she married Elvis. Todd has exhibited at the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, the 2006 Busan Biennale in South Korea, the Zacheta National Gallery of Art in Warsaw, the Auckland Art Gallery and Heide Museum of Modern Art. The artwork is one of the most ambitious, accomplished and astonishing tapestries ever produced by the Workshop.

## NEW COMMISSIONS Melbourne Recital Centre Bentinck Island artists

– *Dulka warngiid (Land of all)*

Artists: Sally Gabori, Amy Loogatha, Netta Loogatha, May Moodoonuthi, Dawn Naranatjil, Paula Paul and Ethel Thomas

Weavers: Rebecca Moulton and Cheryl Thornton

The commission to produce this tapestry is an enormously important and symbolic one. The tapestry will be hung in the foyer of the Elisabeth Murdoch Hall, in the soon-to-be completed Melbourne Recital Centre. It is Dame Elisabeth's wish that a major tapestry should hang at the Recital Centre, bringing together her loves of music, art and tapestry and its launch happily coincided with her 99th birthday. The completion of the tapestry and the opening of the new building will coincide with her 100th birthday in February 2009.

## Director's Diary



Susie Shears

What a marvellous range of tapestries are currently being woven at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop! Six varied weaving commissions are now underway, and many visitors have commented on the astonishing breadth of work being made at the Workshop, and the array of artists and designs with which we have been working in this first part of 2008.

Last month I was in Paris to unveil the engaging Mary McLean tapestry, *Painting at Kalkukatjara*, at the OECD's new conference centre, and I am very pleased to report how impressive the sole artwork from Australia appeared in this handsome contemporary space. While I was in Paris I also met with His Excellency David Ritchie, the Australian Ambassador to France, and discussed the new tapestry that we hope will be the next in the series of indigenous tapestries being made for Australia's embassies and high commissions.

In *Land of all*, each of the seven artists' designs is geographically placed around the canvas as an indication of their ancestral storyplaces in their homeland, Bentinck Island. Each woman is responding to her own physical environment and concerns, and illustrates a collaborative, developing and uniquely Australian indigenous living art. "We each painted our country area which was special for us. Our painting is all of our country. That's what the title means - country, place, land - land of all."

Unlike other indigenous communities, the Kaiadilt (Bentinck Island) people have no graphic, pre-European art

The remainder of my time away was involved with the Workshop's travelling exhibition *From here to Eternity: contemporary Australian tapestries from the Victorian Tapestry Workshop* at the Monash University Centre in Prato, in Italy. The exhibition of 27 works was opened by the Australian Ambassador to Italy, Her Excellency Amanda Vanstone, on 14 April. Two of those works were exhibited at the Textile Museum in Prato. The opening was very well attended by Italians and Australians, and colleagues from the Dovecot Studios in Edinburgh also flew in especially for the evening. We were delighted with the connections made at the University and the Textile Museum, and have great plans for the future development of these relationships in Prato. Upon its return to Australia, the exhibition will be on display later this year at the Hamilton Art Gallery from 16 July to 24 August, at the Castlemaine Gallery from 6 to 28 September and at the new Anne + Gordon Samstag Museum of Art in Adelaide from 31 October to 30 January 2009.

Do make sure that you see this outstanding exhibition from the Workshop over the coming months, and view the new tapestries that are developing on the looms.

**Susie Shears**  
Director

tradition aside from body painting, and so these artists were afforded a remarkable freedom to express their ideas with no particular precedent.

The very painterly nature of the brush strokes lends itself to the interpretive process, giving the weavers extensive licence while keeping true to the form of the painting. The weavers are about to embark on interpreting the work of Amy Loogatha, having already completed the sections designed by Netta Loogatha and Ethel Thomas.

The painting on which the tapestry is based was recently acquired by the National Gallery of Victoria.



*Dulka warngiid* by seven Bentinck Island artists

## Foxtel, Sydney

David Larwill – *At the box*

The tapestry has been commissioned by CEO Kim Williams for Foxtel's Sydney boardroom

Weavers: Chris Cochius and Mala Anthony

This is the fourth occasion on which David Larwill has collaborated with the Workshop. Previously we have woven *Diggers*, commissioned by the University of Ballarat in 2003, *The talk*, which was created for the VTW exhibition collection in 2002, and the *Celebration* tapestry woven in 1999 for the Singapore Arts Centre, as a gift from the Victorian Government.

David is very responsive to the Workshop's philosophy of interpreting designs rather than simply reproducing them in a woven form. He encourages the weavers to contribute their own responses to his work and finds this adds a creative energy to his tapestries, making them powerful works of art.

David Larwill was part of the early 1980s 'Roar' movement, a group of art students committed to the concept of minimising contact with the art establishment while forging forward as an artistic force of their time. David's use of rich colour and exaggerated lines results in strong images that excite the eye and exude a warmth that encapsulates the tribal/primitive element in which he is interested.

Larwill's most well-known pieces have been heavily influenced by the indigenous art of New Guinea and central Australia. He has had numerous solo and group exhibitions nationally and is represented in many public and private collections.



Trevor Nickolls *Kimberley under the stars*

## Tapestry Foundation Embassy Project

Trevor Nickolls – *Kimberley under the stars*

Weavers: John Dicks and Milly Formby

This tapestry is based on an existing painting by Trevor Nickolls, "the father of urban Aboriginal art", entitled *Kimberley under the stars*. The work was painted on Trevor's expedition to Warmun, Western Australia, in 2002 to visit Rover Thomas's country at Turkey Creek. The tapestry has been commissioned by the Tapestry Foundation of Victoria and will be the fourth tapestry in its Embassy series. *Kimberley under the stars* will be lent to the Australian Embassy in Washington DC and will be launched there in conjunction with the *From here to Eternity* exhibition in November 2009.

Trevor Nickolls was the first indigenous Australian artist to receive a qualification from an Australian art school, the South Australian School of Art. Born to an Aboriginal mother and an English-Irish father, Nickolls' work consistently addresses the issues of duality and urbanisation that face modern Aboriginal peoples. He began exhibiting his work in early 1970.

Nickolls draws freely from both European and Aboriginal art traditions, often using his art practice to comment on current political issues, as well as satirising materialism and advertising. Nickolls has had an illustrious career, with his work represented in an extensive array of the major public and private collections in Australia. He was chosen to represent Australia in the 1990 Venice Biennale with Rover Thomas.

Each of the Embassy tapestries showcase Australian indigenous art, presenting a uniquely indigenous face to the world. These tapestries are part of the Workshop's dynamic exhibition collection and are lent to the embassies and high commissions participating in the project. This tapestry follows the three made previously for the Embassy series, now hanging in Tokyo, Beijing and New Delhi.

The Workshop is grateful to Vivien Anderson for kindly lending the painting for the duration of the weaving.

## Artist in Residency Program Mary-Louise Edwards

I recently had the opportunity to work at the Victorian Tapestry Workshop as artist-in-residence for a period of six weeks. The experience proved to be as rich and rewarding as I had hoped, and resulted in the development of a series of relief works that responded to current projects and practices at the Workshop.

Certain characteristics of tapestry construction resonated with me during my time at the VTW and continue to carry across to my studio practice. These include the strong vertical and insistent line of warp, the impressive

negotiation with scale and the assertion of drawing processes and decision-making throughout the construction of a tapestry.

The wonderful staff and weavers at the VTW were generous with their time and thoughts and their willingness to engage with me in discussion about any number of contemporary art issues.

I would like to sincerely thank everyone for making my time at the VTW stimulating and memorable and for broadening my experience of the multi-layered practice of tapestry weaving.

Mary-Louise Edwards  
March 2008



Mary-Louise Edwards

## Annual Hancock Fellowship 2008: Sue Lawty

British artist Sue Lawty is regarded as one of the most accomplished and innovative tapestry weavers in the world. Employing a diverse range of media, Lawty's subtle and evocative work presents an intense and joyous celebration of the natural world, articulated in textural form – connecting the historic with the contemporary, the traditional with the experimental and the elemental with the spiritual.

Lawty is well-known for her work with historical and ethnographic museum collections. During 2005-06 Lawty was artist-in-residence at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London where

her experiences with the historic textile collection inspired the solo exhibition *Concealed-Discovered-Revealed*. Also in conjunction with the Victoria and Albert Museum, she devised the *World Beach Project* – a global art project open to anybody, anywhere, which builds on the experience we all share of making patterns on beaches and shorelines.

During her recent two-week residency at the VTW, Lawty worked alongside the weavers, discussing conceptual and technical concerns related to their shared medium of tapestry weaving and complementary art practices.

### Bias Bound

Stephen Wickham, a past artist-in-residence at the Workshop, and VTW Studio Manager Sara Lindsay are curating a series of exhibitions titled *Bias Bound*. These exhibitions provide the VTW weavers with the opportunity to exhibit alongside artists whose work has been interpreted into tapestries at the VTW and/or who have participated in the residency program between 2006 and 2008.

*Bias Bound* will be held across three venues and the three shows will be on throughout August 2008. They will be held simultaneously and will feature small works by each participating artist. A range of works will be on show, rich and varied in form and content.

#### Stephen McLaughlan Gallery

8th floor, Nicholas Building  
37 Swanston Street, Melbourne  
31 July – 23 August

#### Victorian Tapestry Workshop Gallery

264 Park Street, South Melbourne  
5 August – 29 August

#### Self Preservation

70 Bourke Street, Melbourne  
6 August – 31 August

### Knitting Classes with Debo McNab

Stripes, squares, triangles and diamonds feature in Debo's 2008 program, adorning everything from fabulous berets and beanies to blankets and bed socks, jumpers and cardies, to toys for tots.

**Classes: 26 May, 10 & 23 June, 7 & 21 July, 4, 18 & 25 August** with a different theme for each class.

Please go to [www.victapestry.com.au](http://www.victapestry.com.au) or contact the VTW for details.

Bookings are essential as places are limited. Each class costs \$50.

The Victorian Tapestry Workshop was established in 1976 by the Government of Victoria to enable Australian artists to work with the rich and sumptuous medium that has entranced great artists and patrons down the centuries. The Workshop has a reputation as the foremost contemporary tapestry studio in the world today. It attracts international and Australian artists and collectors, resulting in an output of exceptional contemporary tapestries now numbering in the hundreds.

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#### Patrons

Dame Elisabeth Murdoch AC DBE  
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Peter Williams *Chairman*  
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Robyn Cass  
John Cattapan  
Paul Quinn  
Diana Renard  
Geoff Ricardo  
John Ridley  
Tim Shannon

#### Tapestry Foundation Executive Committee

Janet Calvert-Jones AO *Chairman and Trustee*  
Ian Evans *Treasurer and Alternate Trustee*  
Carrillo Gantner AO *Trustee*  
Baillieu Myer AC *Trustee*  
Dr Fiona Caro *Executive Member*  
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Sue Westwood *Business Manager*  
Lily Fraser *Administrative Assistant*  
Kathryn Ross *Publicist*

#### Weavers

Mala Anthony  
Sue Batten  
Leonie Bessant  
Chris Cochius  
Amy Cornall  
John Dicks  
Milly Formby  
Pamela Joyce  
Louise King  
Rebecca Moulton  
Jennifer Sharpe  
Emma Sulzer  
Cheryl Thornton  
Caroline Tully

Textile Conservator Consultant  
Elizabeth Piiven

VTW Dyer  
Cliff Renshaw

Photographs  
Viki Petherbridge  
Lily Fraser

**ARTS  
VICTORIA**

**Victoria**  
The Place To Be

As I write to you today I am looking forward to our first Friends function of the year: an 'Artist Speaks' night – 'Facing the Future' – with two large-scale tapestries being discussed. Jon Cattapan is to speak about his involvement with the Xavier College tapestry and his futuristic and exciting design for this called *The visitor*. Lead weaver Chris Cochius will talk about the challenges of creating a vibrant, almost electrically-charged large tapestry from essentially a small artwork.

Yvonne Todd's arresting portrait in tapestry entitled *Alice Bayke* will also be presented – myself giving a background to the art of this exciting young New Zealand artist. Lead weaver, Sue Batten, will discuss the challenges of the translation of photography to tapestry.

This year's mid-winter lecture will be held on 28 July. Susan McCulloch will give an illustrated lecture on Aboriginal art to coincide with the launch of her new book, *The heart of everything: the art and artists of Mornington and Bentinck Islands*, and also speak about the recently updated *Encyclopaedia of Australian Art*.

We are going to have a tram tour this year – 13 October is the date! If you'd like to come/bring a friend, just ring the Workshop on 9699 7885 and make a booking with Lily Fraser.

Look forward to seeing you.

**Best wishes**

**Robyn**