

Carol Rudyard – exhibition opening speech by Lee Kinsella

31 November 2019

Thanks to Felicity Johnston and Art Collective WA, David Forrest, Jánis Nedéla, and the Rudyard family for their ongoing support of Carol and as champions of her work. I have to say that it is a great privilege to be able to view this survey of key moments in Rudyard's practice alongside Carol's family, supporters and art lovers. And with the artist here also!

We have many things to celebrate - Carol turned 97 years old earlier in the month and now this exhibition is an opportunity to reconsider the impact of Carol and her practice. We also recognise how contemporary and sophisticated her works continue to be, decades after their production. To this end we will be publishing a book on Carol's practice. If you would like to support this project, please come and speak to us.

What is identifiable in Carol's early work is an engagement with international art and influences, particularly European and American abstract paintings. Working across textiles and painting she produced highly evocative landscapes in response to the specific light, colours and flora of regional Western Australia. Later, recognisable features of landscape dissolved into large, confident abstract works. Her early art practice was founded on the realisation that both art and music could evoke a sense of the incommunicable, towards a kind of spiritual expression.

By the time she graduated with her post-graduate diploma from Curtin University in 1981, Rudyard was abandoning painting to take up photography and experiment with video production. During this period, Rudyard drew upon rich visual references from Nolan, to Picasso and Vermeer, alongside popular culture in the form of magazine imagery. The anchor point for her explorations was the everyday and seemingly mundane domestic sphere. But for Carol, these were the tether points from which she unfurled remarkable explorations that ranged across philosophy, visual theory and art history. As reflected in the gleaming chrome of a toaster and inspired by Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, the artist created parallel worlds which had alternate relationships with time and memory. In doing so, she easily bypassed notions of physical or geographical isolation to site her practice within the flow of ideas that encircled the globe.

And her work was recognised as such, being selected for many national surveys in the 80s and 90s: *Biennale of Sydney*, *Adelaide Biennale of Contemporary Art*. Plus, international exhibitions: in 1989 *In Transit* was shown in Canterbury and Chisenhale Gallery, London; and her work was also included in *The Australian Art Exhibition, (Australian Bicentennial Perspective)* Frankfurter Kunstverein and Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart, Germany

To these videos: remarkable! Yesterday, Carol told me of an incident that has completely changed how I view the dramatic VISIONS OF XES video, which is characterised by the chrome grill of a Rolls Royce, and human bodies that have been torn apart: 8-year-old Carol had to cross a very busy road every morning as she walked to school. On this day, she saw a Rolls Royce coming towards her. She recalls that it was a quieter car than most other vehicles and blames this for her misjudging its speed and choosing to run in front of the vehicle. She was struck by the chauffeur-driven car and the wealthy older woman in the back of the car was

shocked by the incident that left Carol unconscious and broken on the road. She was scooped up and awoke in a local hospital with cracked ribs and an arm that was broken in several places. I now have a better understanding of the very personal foundation of this investigation into excesses of wealth and power as reflected in the dislocated, sexualised parts of bodies of machines and humans.

Another video, UNREAL CITY 2000, relates to Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* with photographs from this body of work hung in this space to face out into yet another glass arcade. In it, the textual montage of Benjamin is met with Rudyard's visual montage of arcades - his moment in time in 19th century Parisian arcades versus the quickly disappearing arcades of Perth city in 2000. Hers was a visual rendition of fragmentation, reflection and constant change from multiple angles in the modern age, writ-large in iron and glass. So, it is very appropriate that it is shown here in this gallery space at Art Collective.

I will finish by offering my thanks to Carol for her ongoing impact upon the contemporary cultural and visual landscape, and congratulations on this exhibition - yet another milestone in a most remarkable career.

Approaching her 97th year, Carol Rudyard is now regarded as one of Western Australia's most important, groundbreaking and influential artists alive today. The only Western Australian artist to have been awarded an Australian Artists Creative Fellowship ("A Keating Fellowship") (1994), she was awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters from Curtin University in 1999, and made a Living Treasure of the State of Western Australia in 2004.

Carol Rudyard, came to art late in life, completing formal studies when she was in her late forties. Her work is held in all State Collections and the National Gallery of Australia. Arriving in Perth in 1970, Carol Rudyard immersed herself in the visual arts. Her earliest works were meticulous and elegant hard-edged paintings but by 1980 when she enrolled in a fine arts degree, she was exploring new media, first in slides and sound and later in video with installation. In these works she rigorously analysed the structural nature of the medium in keeping with the best conceptual art traditions while bringing a rich poetic and often erotic content to their form.

Like most of Rudyard's subsequent works, her everyday and domestic world is transformed into a rich tapestry of minutely observed qualities which then unfold and connect her solitary life to the world outside her window. Through a complex network of cultural connections, she takes us on a journey from the intimate and ordinary to visions of connectivity and association.

Carol Rudyard was born in England in 1922. She left Sheffield in 1947 with her husband, a doctor employed by the British Government, and lived on the Gilbert and Ellice Islands (British Colonies in the Pacific).

They arrived in Western Australia in 1950, and lived in Mullewa and Southern Cross, before settling in the Perth suburb of Leederville in 1956. At this point Rudyard began designing textiles, (two of which will be shown in her exhibition with the Art Collective in

November/December this year) quickly achieving both commercial and artistic successes. She also painted watercolours, and won the Festival of Perth Poster Prize for an untitled work in 1964.

Carol Rudyard enrolled in an Associate Diploma in Art at the West Australian Institute of Technology from 1968-1970. She was awarded the Mundaring Art Prize in 1970, by Guy Grey-Smith with a work which will also feature in her exhibition with the Art Collective She began teaching at the West Australian Institute of Technology in 1971. Carol travelled to Europe in 1972 and held her first solo exhibition in 1973.

After completing a postgraduate diploma in visual art at Curtin University in 1981, she began to abandon painting for audio visual mediums, particularly video installations. She was awarded an honorary Doctor of Letters from Curtin University in 1999, and made a Living Treasure of the State of Western Australia in 2004.