

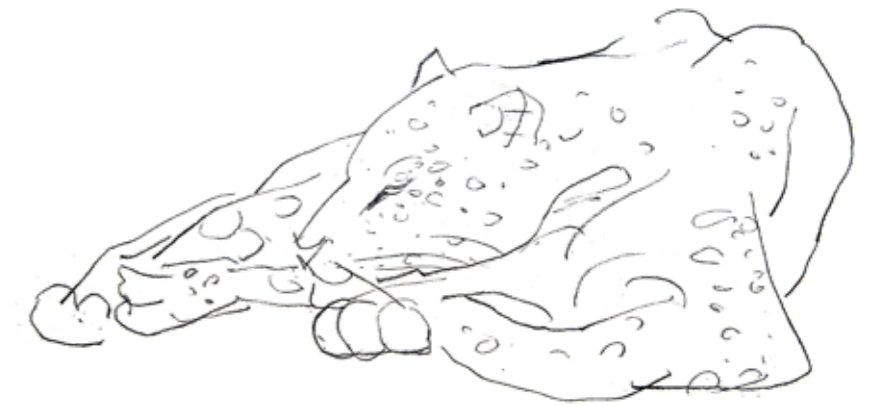


MARY MACQUEEN A RETROSPECTIVE

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13 MARCH - 26 APRIL 2020

Publication sponsor



INTRODUCTION

There's a wonderful watercolour in this exhibition that might not usually be included in a survey show such as this. A quaint street scene, two women chat across a somewhat ramshackle picket fence. It's a moment of pause amidst daily domestic duties. The woman on the street carries a shopping basket while the lady of the house dons an apron, partially framed by an open door behind her. The ochre rendering of the Victorian era home jumps forward of the sublime violet shadows that it casts – particularly that of the chimney, which parallels itself on the whitewashed side wall of a neighbouring row of terraces. The street in the foreground is bathed in warm sunlight. The sky above is a clear pale blue. Quite a pleasant scene, all in all. But what makes this work remarkable is the fact that the artist has torn it in two.

The tear cuts directly through the conversing women. The female figure on the footpath visibly stutters as the fracture separates her cradling arm from her torso. It's a violent action, however one that might be directed more at what the figures represent as opposed to a critical judgement on what is really quite an accomplished painting. Charles Nodrum notes in his biographical contribution to this catalogue, there was a time in the earlier years of Mary Macqueen's life where a "tension (existed) between the competing demands of art and family." This uncomfortable coupling of domestic duty and creative compulsion was doubtlessly a source of frustration for Macqueen. It's not difficult to imagine (be it true or not) the act of running a laceration through a depiction of what was widely accepted to be the place of a woman in society to be a recoil against this norm.

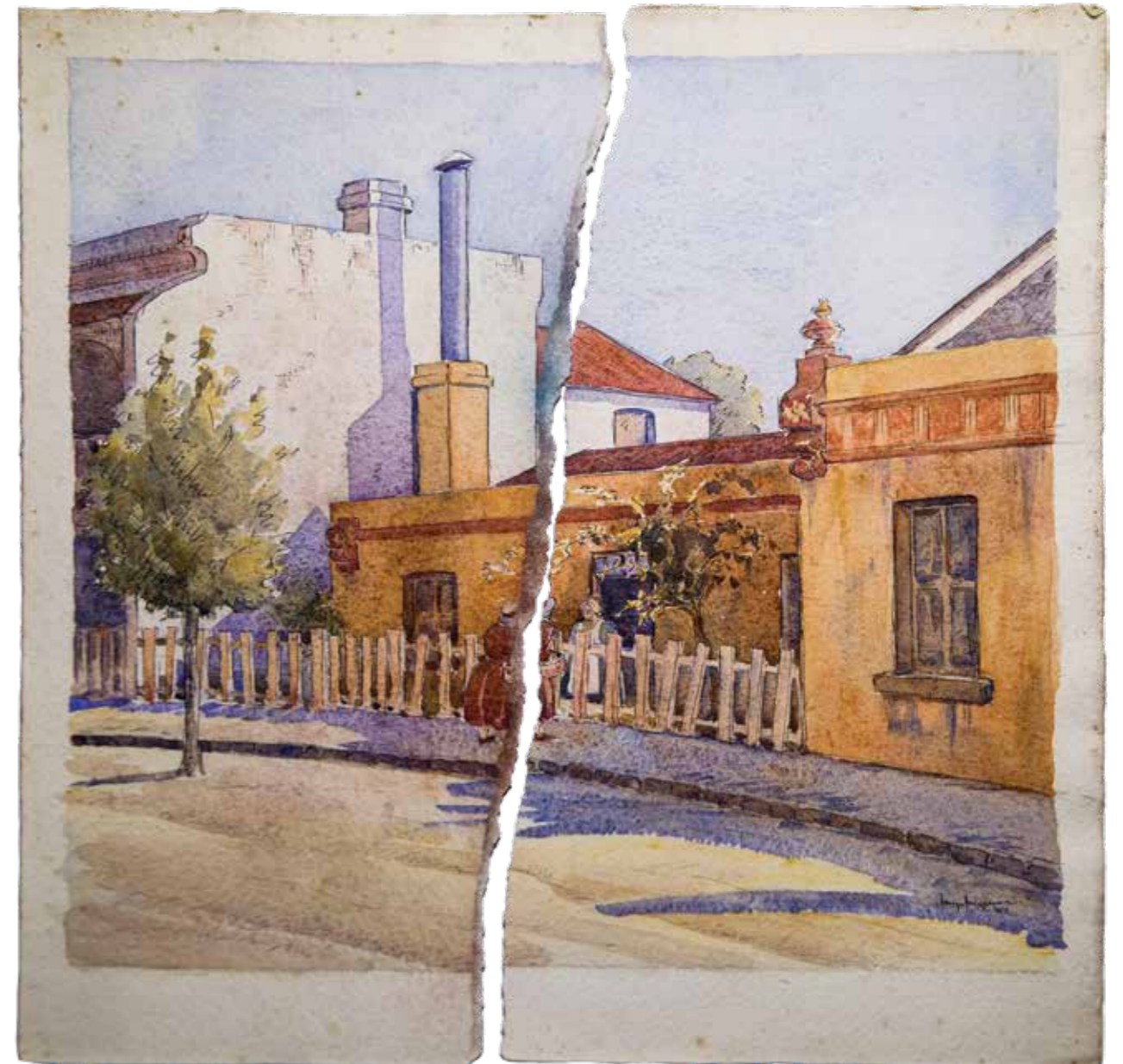
Both the frustration and the reality of this circumstance might be seen to find its way into Macqueen's works in different ways and to varying degrees. Pent up in domestic observances, art clashes with family life in *Asleep in front room with Duncan's frugal horn*. Similarly, *Anniversary* – one of many still life works Macqueen completed – depicts the world outside as seen through the window of a confined domestic space alongside vases holding flowers and glasses filled with wine. It's an intriguing work, as both the interior scene and the landscape beyond appear to be on the same side as the divisive window frame, while also paradoxically breaching it at various points. *Little girls get ballet practice* literally places boxes around the various and often gendered activities that play out across suburbia, while it's not that much of a leap to recognise that Macqueen's ongoing fascination with animals at the zoo again becomes a study of confined and restricted creatures.

It is inarguable that Mary Macqueen was exceptionally skilled at deploying a lyrical line. Her decisive mark making often provided just enough detail to render her depictions of the world around her both poetic and potent. It would be a mistake, however, to let this command of craft obfuscate the critical eye that honed in on subjects that orbited the tensions and social dynamics of her world.

Michael Brennan

Gallery Director, Noosa Regional Gallery

Previous page: *Leopard*, ND, pencil.
Right: *Street scene*, 1943, water colour.



MARY MACQUEEN



She studied, briefly, at Swinburne, then with William Dargie, and later with George Bell - arguably the most influential teacher in Australia in the mid 20th century. His method, grounded on formal principles, was alien to her central direction which, she soon discovered, was towards spontaneity and the expressive mark. This also accounts for her medium: pencil predominates (easily, at least in numbers; landscapes, animals and domesticity) with watercolour and charcoal following - aside from an extensive body of lithographs.

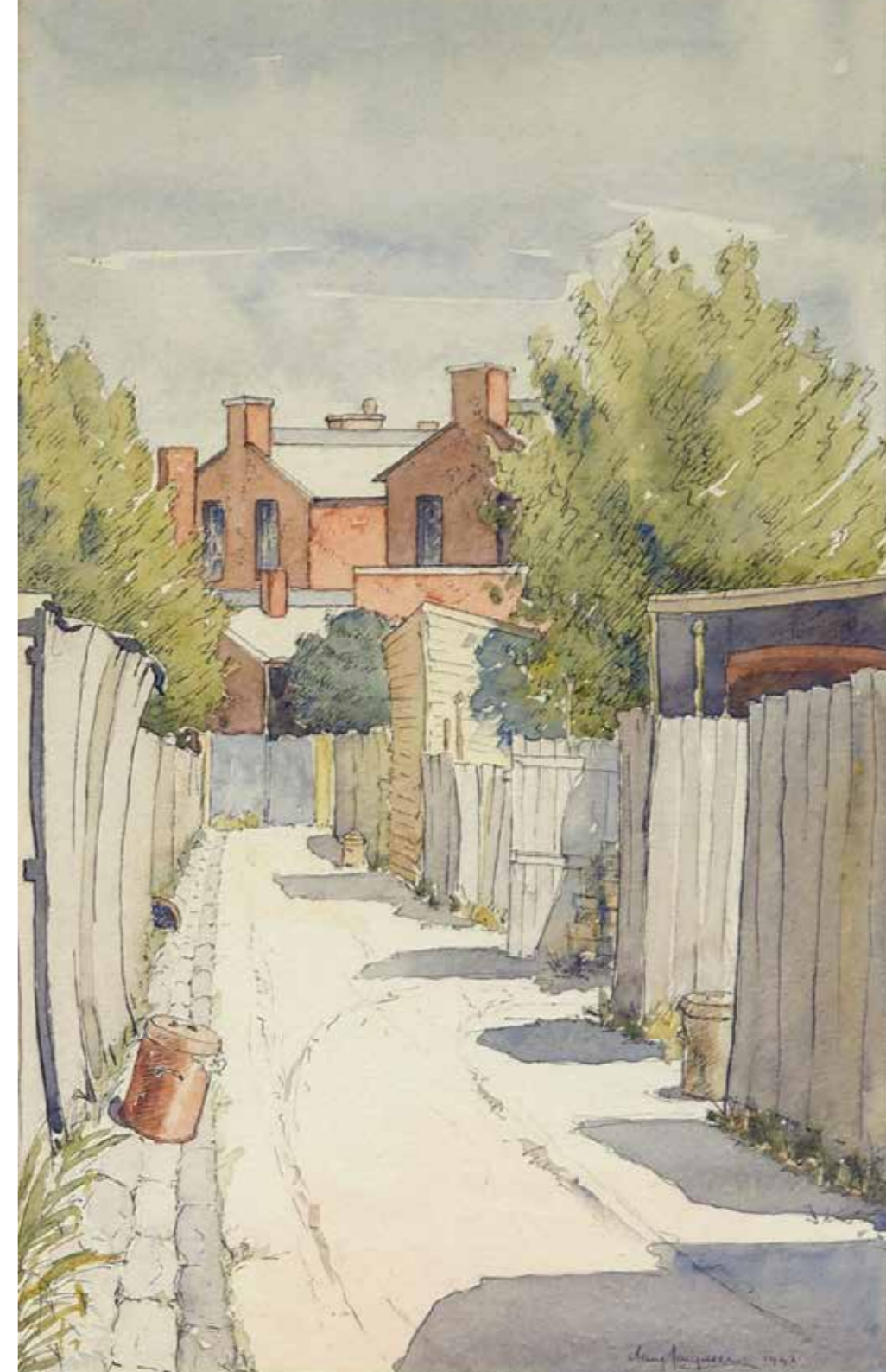
She lived, to outward appearances, a quiet life in one of Melbourne's more comfortable suburbs. Married in 1930, at eighteen, to an accountant markedly older than herself, her life centred around

her family. East Kew is not Bohemia, and it was a life where church on Sundays took precedence over parties on Saturdays. She had four children who, as happens, absorbed much of her time, so it is no coincidence that the bulk of her work dates from her later years. It also accounts for two decades of tension between the competing demands of art and family: she describes herself as, at the time, "difficult to live with" and "[longing] for solitude and time away" ¹; and, in general, as "a loner" ¹ and how "my nervousness with people was a handicap"². By 1971, she was finally alone in the house and a new life emerged. "*I was fifty-nine and free*" ¹

Her subject matter remained focused from the outset: beginning, in the late 1940s, with inner suburban streets and parks, she quickly gravitated to the coast and the country - the Western District with its undulating hills, the Mornington Peninsula and Phillip Island, with their beaches, boats and harbours. Then, as ever, there was a practical issue: she did not drive, so relied on public transport, or friends; either way, she had to travel light, so a sketchbook and her "favourite 4B" ² were both minimal and sufficient. From 1971 she starts to travel - visiting Queensland, drawing the Glasshouse Mountains; Sydney, where the yachts on the harbour are the source of some of her most spectacular watercolours; Perth, with more yachts on the Swan River and the awe inspiring emptiness of the Nullabor; England, to visit her son in Norfolk, with its peaceful cows that appear in both prints and drawings; North America, from San Francisco to Calgary; and Kenya, to see the wildlife and draw the elegant grazing animals, and their equally elegant feline predators.

These Mary MacQueen had known for years. She spent hours at the Melbourne Zoo and tirelessly sketched its inhabitants - as she did in London, Singapore and Sydney. Sketchbooks were filled with acutely sensitive drawings of lions, giraffes, monkeys and birds - there are domestic animals also, cats and dogs, chooks and cows - all in a relentless search for the perfect line. The spontaneity she practiced had its downside: the failure rate was high with many (often good) drawings crossed out. And their seeming effortless is misleading: "... drawing perhaps for two hours at the zoo but producing nothing of consequence. Suddenly there is the feeling that line takes over, then maybe I have a good drawing, sometimes even several". ¹ But overall, they succeed. She repeatedly captures their underlying but essential quality: not just the cat, but its suppleness; the watchful tranquility of gorillas; the perkiness of bantams; the spindliness of giraffes; the energy of gazelles.

Lane in East Kew, 1942, water colour.



Whilst still being part of the Western tradition which extols a deep respect for nature, there is also an east wind blowing through her work. Her eagles and pigeons are as far away from John Gould as it's possible to get, so from this angle, her work relates more easily to the oriental tradition with its effort to extract a visual (quasi Platonic) essence. Such systems are reductive and achieve their ends not by recording each and every detail but by stripping off all the unessential. Alternatively, they don't depict, they evoke. What's drawn is not what we see but it is (paradoxically) what's there, what's real. Similarly with her landscapes: the British watercolour tradition (I'm thinking Cozens) valued speed and spontaneity rather than depictive precision; here again she seeks an essential quality - the windiness of the harbour; the emptiness of the desert.

In the 1980s she took to collage. These were usually made from hand made papers (mostly Nepalese) often acquired on her travels – "... beautiful, extremely organic, grainy stuff".¹ They are an exception in her oeuvre since they are clearly not spontaneous, they were about carefully ordered forms and placement. At one level they require just the sort of approach she had rejected at George Bell's. However in this case their origin can be tentatively found in two, quite disparate sources. Visiting Norfolk, she had been fascinated by the way the cows placed themselves across the fields: a subtle order seemed to emanate from an apparent randomness. Then there's Antoni Tàpies, whose work she admired, and whose collages also exploit a paradox. We know he thinks long and deep about what goes where, but it often looks as though the collaged elements found their own way to their final place - as if by themselves. Mary MacQueen's collages sometimes maintain a figurative base and thus require a more formal presentation, and at other times are more loosely articulated and hence

less structured. Yet either way she seems to bridge that gap between the randomness of spontaneity and an unanalysable sense of necessity.

To finish - two outside opinions. First, Alan McCulloch, whose critical eye for drawing was hard to please: "Her open line drawings of birds and animals spontaneously observed and recorded have won her a place in this genre second to none in contemporary Australian drawing".³ And Mike Brown (whose pornography-based collages she had seen in 1986 – "I don't like his subject matter" she sniffed, "but ... he's a marvelous collagist") briskly homing in on the forthrightness of her work, its utter lack of fuss or dither: "The good thing about Mary is... *she just does it*".

Charles Nodrum

Gallery Director, Charles Nodrum Gallery

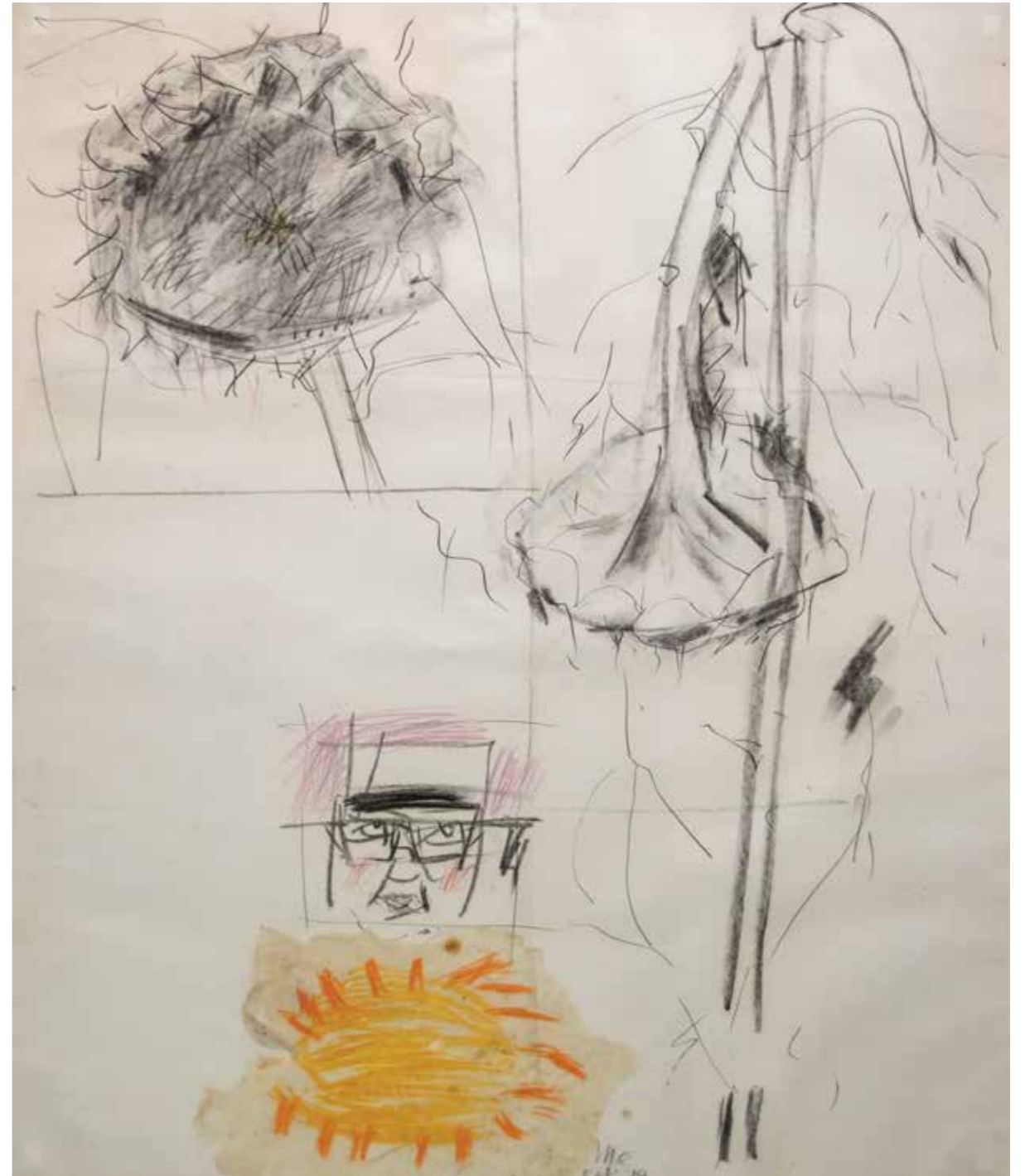
¹ Patricia Grimshaw and Lynne Strachan, eds. *The Half-Open Door*, Hale and Iremonger, Sydney, 1982, pp 84, 85, 86, 90.

² Mary Holyoake, foreword, *The Drawings of Mary MacQueen*, Pioneer Design Studio, Melbourne, 1986 (unpaginated)

³ Alan McCulloch, *Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, all editions post 1984.



Little girl with cat, 1984, mixed media.



Above: *Work table*, 1977 – 1982, mixed media.
Right: *Me (self portrait)*, 1974, chalk and paper.



Above: *Asleep in front room with Duncan's frugal horn*, 1956, ink.
Right: *Duncan*, c 1950's, ink.



Duncan



Above: *Carlton Scene*, 1961, lithograph.
Right: *Terraced houses*, c 1940's, water colour.





Top: Working drawing, ND, pencil.
Bottom: Street scene with terraced houses, ND, pencil.



Terraced house, 1961, lithograph.



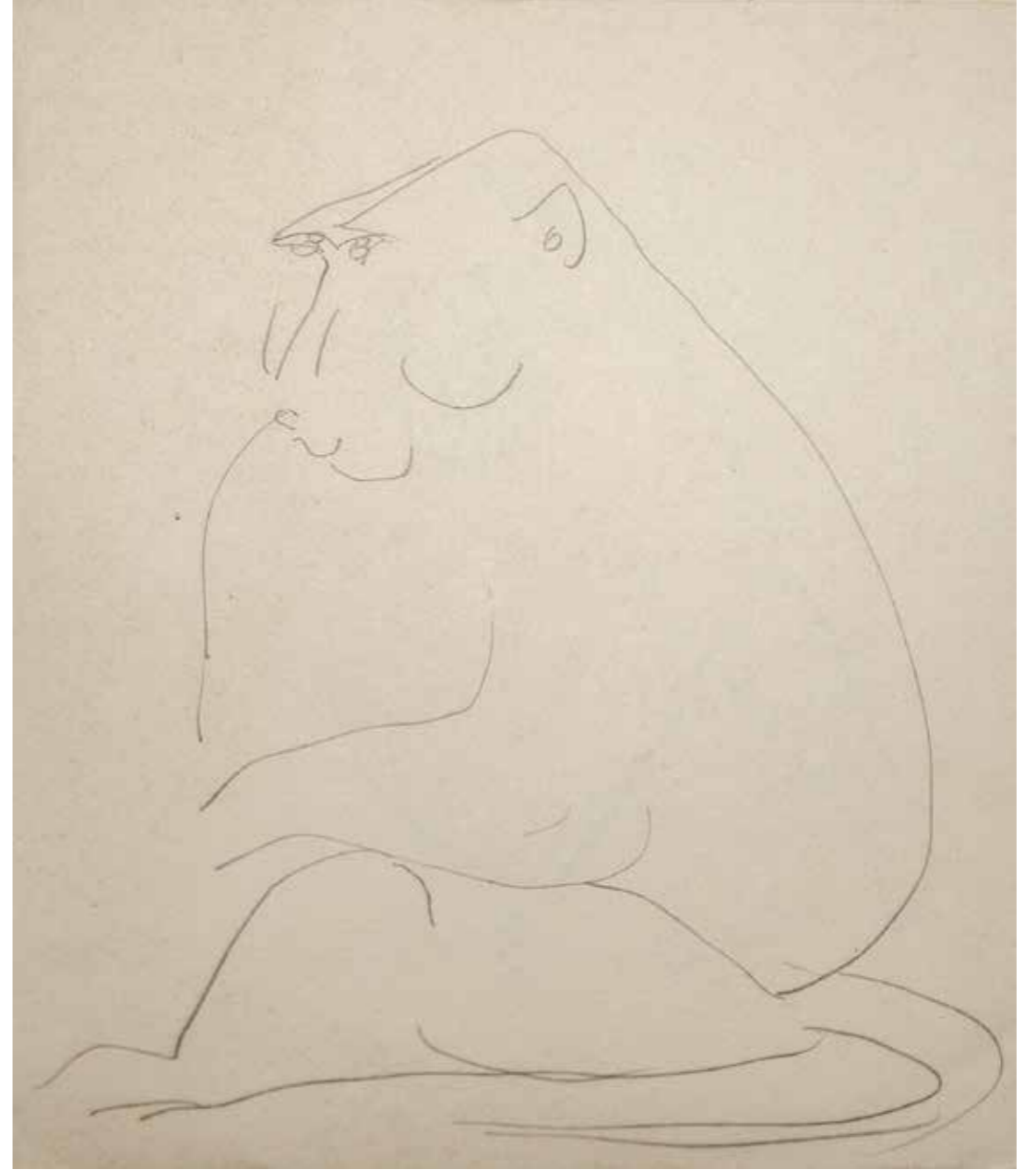
Still Life, 1963, water colour.



Left: *Giraffe*, 1979, lithograph.
Above: *Giraffe*, 1972, charcoal.



Above: *Monkeys*, ND, pencil.
Right: *Baboon*, ND, pencil.





Top: *The stoney rises*, 1969, lithograph.
Bottom: *Flood aftermath*, 1982, lithograph.

Right: *Over Palm Desert*, 1978, mixed media



Chilli cookout, 1980, coloured pencil and charcoal.





Morning SF Bay, 1980, chalk.

LIST OF WORKS

Back Fence, c 1920's, water colour, 23 x 22.5cm

Terraced houses, c 1940's, water colour, 23 X 23cm

Fitzroy, c 1940's, pencil, 30.5 x 25cm

Lane in East Kew, 1942, water colour, 24.5 x 16cm

Street scene, 1943, water colour, 35.5 x 34cm

Laneway and back of building East Kew, 1944, pencil, 31 x 24.5cm

Duncan, c 1950's, ink, 25 x 27cm

Asleep in front room with Duncan's frugal horn, 1956, ink, 27 x 37cm

Studio Interior, 1956, lithograph, 36 x 29cm

Puter Mug, c 1960's, etching, 18 x 18.5cm

Neighbours dog, c 1960's, pencil, 37.5 x 35.5cm

Cow drawn by Mary's grand mother Mary McCartney Pettigrew, 1961, pencil, 18 x 27cm

Terraced house, 1961, lithograph, 33 x 36cm

Carlton scene, 1961, lithograph, 24 x 30cm

Anniversary, 1963, water colour, 42.5 x 52.5cm

Still life, 1963, water colour, 37 x 52cm

Double image Spring, 1963, etching, 29 x 39.5cm

Lenore, 1965, lithograph, 47 x 54cm

Royal Melbourne Show, 1966, pencil, 24.5 x 35cm

Husband Alan Macqueen, 1966, ink, 27 x 37cm

Eagle resting, 1966, lithograph, 62.5 x 50.5cm

Little girls get ballet practice, 1966, lithograph, 53 x 40cm

Paddington, 1966, lithograph, 47.5 x 61cm

The stoney rises, 1969, lithograph, 57 x 70cm

Still life with coffee grinder and flower, 1971, water colour and pencil, 34.5 x 39cm

Cock resting, 1971, lithograph, 47 x 57cm

Giraffe, 1972, charcoal, 49 x 33cm

Zebras grazing, 1973, chalk, 50 X 62cm

Me (Self portrait), 1974, chalk and paper, 76 x 58.5cm

Tiger, 1974, pencil, 20.5 x 30cm

Hillock or Black boys (Grass trees) A/P, 1977, lithograph, 52 x 65cm

Giraffes, 1977, lithograph, 45.5 x 30cm

Work table, 1977 - 1982, mixed media., 87 X 112.5cm

Over Palm Desert, 1978, mixed media, (chalk and charcoal), 77.5 x 58.5cm

Work pants - self portrait, 1979, lithograph, 56 x 38cm

Giraffe, 1979, lithograph, 36.9 x 22.5cm

Bush scene, c 1980's, mixed media., 25 X 36.5cm

Chilli cookout, 1980, coloured pencil and charcoal, 28 X 36.5cm

Cows in the meadow, 1980, lithograph, 45 x 60cm

Circa 1912, 1981, mixed media, 56 x 70cm

Cock and pigeon, 1981, lithograph, 25 X 28cm

Morning SF Bay, 1981, chalk, 20 x 28.5cm

Beauty Contest - Chilli Cookoff, 1981, lithograph, 39 x 51cm

Brisbane, 1981, water colour, 28.5 x 37.5cm

San Diego Zoo 4/15, 1981, lithograph, 38 x 57cm

X, 1982, paper, 55 x 80cm

Dancers bottom, 1982, mixed media, 45 x 44cm

Slag - Eaglehawk, 1982, lithograph, 51 x 63cm

Flood aftermath, 1982, lithograph, 37 x 56cm

Paper bag, 1982, hand made paper, 28 x 35.5cm

Nullarbor, A/P, 1983, lithograph, 50 x 70cm

Lion, 1983, pencil, 23 x 30cm

Regents Park, dog lying down, 1983, pencil, 23 x 30cm

Girl with cat, 1984, mixed media, 53 x 48.5cm

Still life, 1987, gouache, 24.5 x 31.5cm

Gorilla, 1987, pencil, 28 x 20cm

Thai work, 1991, collage, water colour, pencil, 23.5 x 30cm

Shapes, 1992, water colour, 18.5 X 29cm

Working drawing (notated), ND, pencil, 25 x 36.5cm

Monkeys, ND, pencil, 19 x 25cm

Bees, ND, paper, 30 X 32cm

Roster with Red, ND, water colour, 15 X 17cm

Circle, ND, water colour, 26.5 X 33.5cm

Floozie, ND, mixed media., 59.5 x 85.5cm

Still life with flowers, ND, lithograph, 27.5 x 32cm

Baboon 01, ND, pencil, 25.5 x 20.5cm

Baboon 02, ND, pencil, 25.5 x 20.5cm

Timmy, ink, ND, 27 x 24cm

Timmy - different positions, ND, pencil sketch, 22.5 x 27cm

Leopard, ND, pencil sketch, 27 x 37.5cm

Jaguar, ND, pencil sketch, 22 x 29.5cm

Leopard Perth Zoo, ND, pencil sketch, 30 x 21cm

Timmy 2, ND, pencil sketch, 27.5 x 37.5cm

Leopard 2, ND, pencil sketch, 27.5 x 37.5

Ostrich, ND, pencil sketch, 23 x 29cm

Gorilla 2, ND, pencil sketch, 25.5 x 35.5cm

Street scene with terraced houses, ND, pencil sketch, 27.5 x 37.5cm

Still life on table (957), ND, chalk, 32.5 x 48cm

MARY MACQUEEN

b.1912, Melbourne; d. 15/9/1994, Melbourne

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

1945 Kozminsky Galleries, Melbourne

1948, 50 Georges Gallery, Melbourne

1967, 69, 71, 74 Crossley Gallery, Melbourne

1973, 83, 84, 85, 88 Powell Street Gallery, Melbourne

1976, 78, 80 Stuart Gertsmann Gallery, Melbourne

1975, 77, 79, 81, 82 Ray Hughes Gallery, Brisbane

1981, 83, 86 Tynte Gallery, Adelaide

1986, 89, 91, 93 Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

1943-57 Victorian Artists Society

1956 *The Arts Festival*, Olympic Games, Melbourne

1960-64 Contemporary Art Society Annual Exhibitions

1963 *Australian Print Survey*, Travelling exhibition to all State Galleries

1966 *Australian Prints Today*, Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C

1971 *Contemporary Australian Prints*, Auckland City Art Gallery

1975 *Recent Drawings*, National Gallery of Victoria

1977 *Selection of 41 Modern Prints from Australia*, Japan Print Association, Tokya

1981 *Spring Festival of Drawing*, Mornington Peninsual Arts Centre

1982 *The Collage Show*, V.A.B. Regional Development program, travelling exhibition to East Coast Regional Galleries

Line and Feline, National Gallery of Victoria

1983 *Australian Perspecta*, Art Gallery NSW

1984 *The Australians*, C.D.S. Gallery, New York

1985 *Half in the Sky*, Australian Women Artists, Art Gallery SA

REPRESENTED

NGA; NGV; AGNSW; QAG; AGSA; AGWA; MAGNT; TMAG; many regional galleries including Ballarat, Bathurst, Bendigo, Castlemaine, Freemantle, Geelong, Ipswich, Mornington, Naracoorte, Newcastle, Shepparton, Tamworth, Townsville. University and C.A.E. Collections – Ballarat, Bendigo, Darling Downs, Deakin, Brisbane, Flinders, Footscray, Griffith, Kelvin Grove, Latrobe, Melbourne, Monash, State College of Victoria. British Museum, London

AWARDS

Numerous prizes including Drawing prize, VAS, 1957; May Day prize, for drawing, 1958; Portland prize, 1965; MPRG Spring Festival of Drawing (work acquired), 1973; Ronald Award, Latrobe Valley Arts Centre, 1973; Maitland prize for prints, 1974; F.E. Richardson Prize (for watercolours), Geelong, 1976.

APPOINTMENTS

Teacher, drawing and printmaking, RMIT, 1956-58

X, 1982, paper.



MARY MACQUEEN: A RETROSPECTIVE

13 MARCH - 26 APRIL 2020

NOOSA REGIONAL GALLERY

Curator: Michael Brennan

Essay: Charles Nodrum

Printing: idprint

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Photography: Duncan Macqueen

Front cover: *Anniversary, 1963*, water colour.

Back cover: *Floozie*, ND, mixed media.

Special thanks to Mayor Tony Wellington and the Noosa Council for supporting the arts in Noosa and the Noosa Hinterland; Michael Brennan and the team at the NRG for doing such a splendid job curating the exhibition; Farley Cameron for designing the layout of this catalogue; Nicole Maggs for putting the pieces together and her early work on the exhibition; Nina Shadforth for her work on the original planning for the exhibition; Charles Nodrum of Charles Nodrum Gallery Richmond Melbourne who handles my mother's work in Melbourne and has some of her works on display concurrently with this exhibition; Peg McGuire along with Charles Nodrum for biographical information and historical documents and Paulette Calhoun for contributing works to the exhibition.

Duncan and Pam Macqueen



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GALLERY

 NOOSA COUNCIL