



MARGARET PRESTON

ART AND LIFE

ONLINE EDUCATION KIT

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Art Gallery of New South Wales 29 July – 23 October 2005

National Gallery of Victoria 12 November 2005 – 29 January 2006

Queensland Art Gallery 18 February – 7 May 2006

Art Gallery of South Australia 26 May – 13 August 2006

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EDUCATION KIT OUTLINE

This education kit highlights key works, ideas and themes from the exhibition *Margaret Preston: art and life* shown at:

Art Gallery of New South Wales, 29 July to 23 October 2005

National Gallery of Victoria, 12 November 2005 to 29 January 2006

Queensland Art Gallery, 18 February to 7 May 2006

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It aims to provide a context for using the art works and associated source material as a resource for Years K-6 (Early and Middle Years), Years 7-10 (Middle Years) and Years 11-12 (senior years) education audiences, with particular reference to the study of Visual Arts and History.

It may be used in conjunction with a visit to the exhibition or as a pre-visit or post-visit resource. The kit has been written with specific reference to the New South Wales Stage 1-3 Creative Arts, Stage 4-6 Visual Arts and Stage 5 History syllabuses, with consideration for its relevance to other state syllabus documents.

The kit also provides specific investigations and approaches for students with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities and gifted and talented students across a range of curriculum areas.

While the kit is written for teacher and student audiences, it may also be of value and interest to a general audience.

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Education Kit coordinated and written by: Tristan Sharp Victoria Collings, Alec George and Leeanne Carr, Amanda Peacock and Sherryl Ryan; Art Gallery of New South Wales with contributions from Tiffany Chimiri, Michael Nichols and Paula Lindley; National Gallery of Victoria.

Stage 5 History material written by Kim Wilson History Head Teacher Kincoppal Rose Bay. Stage 5 History program consultation: Kate Cameron, History Head Teacher Chifley College.

Editor: Jennifer Blunden

Design: J M Hein

Commentary written by Ursula Prunster

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pp@ag.nsw.gov.au

www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/education

Cover: **Self portrait 1930**

oil on canvas 61.3 x 51.1cm

Gift of the artist at the request of the Trustees 1930

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SECTION 1

MARGARET PRESTON (1875–1963)



If Margaret Preston had been a man I feel sure she would have enjoyed a public reputation equally as great as Dobell, Drysdale or Nolan in our time. But she was belligerently and seductively a woman, proud of it, and imperious in her demand that she be accepted as an artist.

AGNSW director (1945–71) Hal Missingham, 1963¹

Margaret Preston aged nineteen 1894 Photographer unknown
National Gallery of Australia. Courtesy of the artist's family

Introduction

Margaret Preston was one of Australia's most celebrated modern artists. Her paintings and prints of the 1920s, 30s and 40s ushered in an era of new modernity, while her forceful opinions, expressed in a wide range of lectures, interviews and writings, established her as one of the most provocative public voices of the time. In a career which extended over five decades, she reinvigorated still-life painting, a marginalised genre in Australia, through a constant re-invention of its forms and an engagement with the central challenges of modernist expression.

Preston's work and her incessant experimentation reflect her constant drive to produce a modern national art based on the principles and motifs of Asian, modernist and Aboriginal art. As Australia's first serious artist-advocate of Aboriginal art, Preston's promotion and appropriation of its imagery to the cause of modernism has contributed to her ongoing significance and controversy. As well as her innovative artistic career, Preston published and lectured widely about her ideas on Australian culture, cementing her place as an independent and influential woman of her time.

Margaret Preston: art and life is the first major retrospective exhibition of the artistic career and life of this important Australian, showcasing over 200 examples of her finest work, including painting, printmaking, ceramics, textiles, illustrative work, photographs and documents.

The curator, Deborah Edwards, and co-curator, conservator Rose Peel, have spent five years locating works for this exhibition. Those selected have come from museum and private collections in Australia, the UK and New Zealand.

The exhibition is presented as a set of experiences, organised chronologically through the decades of Margaret Preston's career.

Commentary

Under the heading, ‘advice to the ambitious’, Margaret Preston stated in 1929:

Unless a young man or woman has private means or powerful physical strength an art career is suicidal and is better left alone. You become a public pest, living in hope only.

A SOLITARY REALISM

Margaret Rose McPherson (1875-1963) was born in Adelaide, and mastered her craft in the same generation as Hans Heysen (1877-1968) and Hugh Ramsay (1877-1906). As she valued her work in still life over the more lucrative and popular forms of landscape or portraiture, Preston’s student ambitions led her to become a ‘solitary realist’, depicting modest domestic utensils, eggs, dead rabbits and onions, ‘with such fidelity to nature that they could almost be used in the kitchen’.

Already known for her stubbornness and independence, Preston decided to specialise in this little regarded genre while still an art student in Melbourne in 1897. Ideas of objectivity and order had always appealed to her, and the palpable world of still life allowed her a degree of artistic control she relished. The National Gallery School instructed its students in the conventions of tonal illusionism. This meant routinely beginning with the deepest background shadows and floating the lighter tones over the top. It restricted the palette and predisposed to a dark style Preston later called ‘tobacco juice’ and rejected for its muddy colouring.

Preston’s first visit to Europe (1904-06) undermined her faith in tonal techniques, and ‘realism received its first rebuff’. She was exposed to the unsettling effects of German Secessionist painting in Munich, and was startled by the works of Matisse and the fauves (wild beasts) she saw on exhibition in Paris in 1905. The impact of fauve colour and the Paris retrospectives of Cézanne and Gauguin she also visited, gave Preston a new sense of the subjectivity of vision, alerting her to the liberating possibilities of pure colour and clear design. On her return to Adelaide she sought something new in her work: ‘the addition of design in colour to realism’. More flamboyant, painterly images resulted, which a local reviewer judged ‘unequalled in Australia in the department of still life’.

TOWARDS A DECORATIVE VISION: 1912-1919

‘Decorative work – it is the only thing worth aiming at for this our century – it’s really the keynote of everything – I’m trying all I know to reduce my still-life to decorations and find it fearfully difficult.’

Preston explained her new ambitions in a letter she posted from Noirmoutier in France in 1913. Living in Europe between 1912 and 1919, she gradually reinvented her art as ‘décor’ – an art of abstract relationships, utilising the vivid colour and compressed space of fauvism – in keeping with her new conviction that ‘art is something made by man to visualise ideas’.

Preston understood the word ‘decoration’ in the modern sense, in terms of a post-impressionist aesthetic, as the opposite of academic realism or tonal illusionism. Critics began to describe her work as ‘decorative’, using the word in its pejorative sense (equated with superficiality) or in its positive sense (harmonious formal unity) depending on whether or not they admired post-impressionism. Preston was particularly attracted to the art of Gauguin and Matisse. In emulation of their work she began to

experiment enthusiastically with modernist composition, patterning areas of bright colour and flattening the picture plane in her still life paintings.

Inspired by Japanese woodcut prints of the ‘ukiyo-e’ school, she cultivated an instinct for asymmetrical, zigzag arrangements of forms and cut-off compositions. Her study of non-Western traditions in the applied and decorative arts also supported Preston’s developing skills in the crafts of pottery and printmaking, which expanded her artistic practice and impacted on her conversion to modernism.

MAKING IT MODERN: THE 1920S

Margaret Preston married William Preston and in 1920, she settled in Sydney, becoming an immediate and largely uncontroversial success. Over the next decade she refined and elaborated the pictorial strategies she had developed in Europe. Recognised as an exceptional colourist, she found supporters amongst the conservative as well as progressive critics.

First voicing her platform for a specifically modern and recognisably Australian art in the 1920s, Preston said she now wanted to construct her images ‘as a purely Australian product’. The aeroplane, which she saw as the acme of modernity, and the machine-like cylindrical forms of Australian plants such as the Banksia, became the new subjects of her art.

Influenced by Art Deco design and the decorative cubism of Fernand Léger, she produced a series of paintings in 1927-28, which were the most austere and uncompromising of her career. Embodying the decade’s preoccupation with geometry and rhythmic construction, these works have come to be seen as icons of Australian modernism.

As she worked to adapt her decorative art to her perceptions of modernity as an age ‘of science and speed’, Preston realised that simultaneously ‘modern’ and ‘timeless’ qualities could be found in the forms of Australian flora and in the colours and patterns of Aboriginal art. She advocated that a modern Australian school of domestic design, art and craft, should have its roots in the nation’s Indigenous culture.

In 1927 she wrote: ‘What is to be our National art? Art is the tangible spirit of a country. What is Australia going to offer the world as her contribution to the arts?’ At a time when the work of Australian modernists was tied to urban and international visions, and within a context of pervasive ignorance of Aboriginal art and culture, Preston was one of the first artists to bring the issue of Aboriginal and white artistic interaction to public attention.

PRESTON AS PRINTMAKER

In decades of particular prominence for women artists, Preston brought the principles of decorative design to Australian modernism. Her hand-coloured woodcut prints became, and remain, some of her most popular works. The products of her ambition to modernise the woodcut print in Australian terms, they introduced a new kind of decorative art to the local audience. Preston’s vibrant images of the modern metropolis and stylised arrangements of Australian flowers were boldly cut and coloured, making her one of the most widely reproduced and recognised artists of the era.

Comparing her approach to the craft of printmaking and that of the great Japanese printmakers, she stressed that her work represented a ‘Western form of woodcutting... quite different from the Eastern.’ She emphasised the hand-made quality of her prints, describing her method proudly as ‘primitive almost to childishness’.

Preston’s flower and cityscape prints combined recognisably realistic if simplified forms with abstracted designs, emphasising linear rhythms, clear colours and contours, firmly outlined in black. Also influenced by Aboriginal designs, Preston explained, ‘In my search for forms which will suggest Australia I prefer wood blocking to painting, for the wood hinders facility and compels the worker to keep the forms severe’.

Preston was keen to promote the democratisation of art. Believing that 'it is only in the close bond between the artist and the people that there can be a national art and culture,' she produced modestly sized and priced prints specifically aimed at the domestic market. She intended her art to decorate the walls of everyday homes and apartments, arguing 'the home is always the reflex of the people who live in it'. Perhaps craftspeople could succeed where artists had failed in modernising Australian culture, because 'the beginning should come from our home and domestic arts'.

THE BEROWRA YEARS: 1932-1939

Margaret Preston's ill health and treatment for cancer may have prompted her move to Berowra, an area long promoted as a therapeutic retreat. Here a low, wide wooden house surrounded by bushland became her base for most of the 1930s. Concentrating on images of local wildflowers, her practice became largely seasonal. Her focus on the Banksia and its strangely anthropomorphic, strongly outlined, sombre form, expressed a more visceral engagement with 'the ancientness of the land' and the 'spirit of country'.

Stylistically, the 1930s proved to be Margaret Preston's most eclectic decade, marked by a sense of struggle, both personal and artistic. Her work evolved in a stop-start fashion, sometimes going over old ground, sometimes treading new. Living in Berowra refined her perceptions of the land. She noted the 'light is stronger and more vivid than that of other countries, and the forms of the country are its own characteristics which the artist must know before he adds his personality to it'. Preston also began to explore rock art sites, evidence of generations of Aboriginal ownership in the Hawkesbury region. This was probably her first experience of Aboriginal art in the landscape.

A formidable program of international travel also heightened her sense of the unique qualities of the Australian environment and of Aboriginal art. She travelled in China, followed Gauguin's footsteps to Tahiti, souvenired a shrunken head in South America and admired the art of the modern Mexican muralists. She concluded: 'visiting other countries to study their art gives the student the vision ... that art is something that comes from the mind', 'each definitely of their own country because instinctively each knows that art is not a picture or a statue but a culture'. Impassioned by this idea, Preston declared: 'Let young Australians rise up ... and demand that works showing their national characteristics can be exhibited ... Have courage before it is too late'.

PRESTON AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

A crisis increasingly close to Australian shores, World War II appalled and infuriated Margaret Preston. The war, she felt, showed society had sacrificed 'humanity, morals and control' and reaped in its turn only, 'savagery ... chaos and sensationalism'. Under wartime pressures and austerities, Preston's artistic nationalism became a committed patriotism. Her imagery of wartime Sydney – of barriers, barbed wire and surveillance – was painted in a restricted 'army' palette. In her mind, Australia was becoming an intellectually barricaded country, and ultimately less Australian.

Preston's works of 1942-46 responded to the war at close proximity, making a characteristically independent statement. Unlike the apocalyptic or surrealist psycho-sexual imagery of the Melbourne modernists, hers was a pragmatic reworking of folk and child art traditions, which she regarded as an inherently democratic and intuitive vehicle for direct, spontaneous communication. Her nostalgic images of fairgrounds and Australians at play also represented an act of faith: that children might still live in a world free of tyranny and war.

Preston wrote to the Jindyworobak poet Ian Mudie, 'I think Australia has gone mad ... It seems to me that if one is pro-Australian it's a matter of treason against old England'. She had long urged Australian artists to align themselves to Asian, not just European, traditions but threats of a Japanese invasion rendered this an increasingly subversive stand. In 1942 Preston predicted

that after the war 'Australia will find herself at a corner of a triangle', with the East (China, India and Japan) and the West (represented by the United States) at the others. 'It will be in the choice of one of these corners that the future of Australian art will lie'. Preston leant towards the East, yet by the 60s, when she died, it had become evident that the majority of Australian artists had chosen American abstract expressionism as the new global modernism.

PRESTON AND THE NATIONAL LANDSCAPE

The Prestons returned from Berowra to live in Sydney on the eve of the war, in 1939. Their trips to Northern and Central Australia in 1940 and 1947 exposed Margaret Preston to forms of Aboriginal rock art and paintings previously unknown to her. She reached a deeper understanding that 'The art of the Aborigine has been for too long neglected. The attention of the Australian people must be drawn to the fact that it is great art.' This realisation sustained the remainder of her career.

At the age of sixty five, Preston became a landscape painter, having been converted to the artistic principles, motifs and palette of Aboriginal art. In this remarkable late flowering, she produced some of her most important and visually spectacular paintings and prints. Although her landscapes espoused an explicitly nationalist agenda – 'an art for Australia from Australians' – they also united the seemingly divergent traditions of European modernism, Aboriginal art and Chinese landscape painting.

Preston's late landscapes represented her effort to distil a sense of the permanent and essential from what was close at hand – the bush-fire scarred land of Berowra, the pink cast of the Hawkesbury sandstone regions, the mauve country of the Northern Territory, or the eucalyptus haze of the Blue Mountains.

Preston's borrowings from Aboriginal motifs and artistic principles to create a nationalist imagery in landscape were, unavoidably, a form of cultural appropriation. In some ways she was ahead of her time, in others, she was limited by the colonialist attitudes of her era, treating the Indigenous cultures that inspired her 'like vacant territories to be exploited'.

PRESTON'S MONOTYPES

In 1946-1948 Preston's experiments with technique resulted in an exceptional series of monotypes, including her last major landscapes.

She excelled in his hybrid technique, merging the spontaneity of painting and drawing with surface effects characteristic of printmaking. In her hands the monotype's inherent fluidity and luminosity became a dryer, opaque all-over surface texture. Preston said she wanted her monotypes to express the 'real' Australia: 'silent, quiet in colour, untidy, constituted of harsh shadows ... primordial hills', 'to give the rough and tumble of our growth of trees without design or any other purpose than that of covering space, as Aborigines do in their well covered rock paintings'.

LAST WORKS: THE 1950S

At the end of the 1940s Preston returned to her first love, still life. She continued to exhibit sporadically until the end of the 1950s. Her last major exhibition comprised an exceptional display of stencil works in 1953. As one critic noted, 'The artist is faithful in the main to her old loves ... But here they seem transformed, transfigured almost'.

As Australian artists engaged with international abstraction in the early 1960s, Preston's advocacy of an abstract language of form and colour based on Aboriginal art and her dreams of a communally-based national aesthetic were increasingly marginalised. By the time of her death in 1963, the territory which Preston sought to cover was being re-possessed and transformed by Aboriginal artists themselves. The role of Indigenous culture remains central to the ongoing debates concerning Australian identity.



Margaret Preston in her Adelaide studio c1909
Photographer unknown Courtesy of the State Library of South Australia

Margaret Preston, believing ‘the character of an individual is not fixed’ reflected her belief in several changes in name over her career. Known to her family as Peg, she worked largely as Rose McPherson until around 1912, after which she generally used Margaret Macpherson, before changing her name (from 1920) to Margaret Preston.

Deborah Edwards curator *Margaret Preston: art and life*

INQUIRY ACTIVITY

Read Margaret Prestons biography. Select and group key events listed under the headings:

PRESTON BIOGRAPHY
ART HISTORY
AUSTRALIAN HISTORY
WORLD HISTORY

Using *Timeline: Preston in context* (Appendix of this kit), place your groups in the appropriate section and year boxes. Discuss how each group may have influenced the other.

Biography: The Art of Margaret’s life

ADELAIDE, SYDNEY AND MELBOURNE

1875

29 April **Margaret Rose McPherson** born in Port Adelaide to David McPherson and Prudence Cleverdon McPherson.

1885

McPherson family moved to Sydney. Recalling her reasons for becoming an artist, she singled out a visit to the Art Gallery of New South Wales with her mother in 1887: ‘her excitement on going through the turnstile to be let at large in a big, quiet, nice-smelling place with a lot of pictures hanging on the walls and here and there students sitting on high stools copying at easels.

1888–92

Undertook brief instruction under painter of seascape vistas **William Lister-Lister**, painted her first still-life.

In Melbourne she enrolled at Oberwyl Ladies’ College for instruction in drawing, china, fan and silkscreen painting, still life and flower studies.

1893

Enrolled in the prestigious National Gallery School’s School of Design under drawing master and impressionist painter Frederick McCubbin ‘the best teacher she could have had ... someone to help but not influence’.

1894

David McPherson admitted to Parkside Lunatic Asylum Adelaide, dying of ‘general paralysis of the insane’ (tertiary syphilis). McPherson completed the first term at the National Gallery School in Melbourne.

1895

Enrolled at the School of Design, Painting and Technical Arts, Adelaide. Came into contact with student **Hans Heysen**, who thought her a ‘hussy’ for ‘sitting right in front of the [nude] model’.

June–July Submitted two paintings (*Still life and Portrait*) as her nomination works for membership of the South Australian Society of Arts, attracted her first reviews as a professional artist.

1896

Continued evening studies at the School of Design then returned to Melbourne and re-enrolled at the National Gallery School.

Won a prize (£3) in December for *Drawing of hands from cast*, before graduating to the Painting School in 1897 studying under **Bernard Hall**.

Decided to focus on the marginalised genre of still life painting.

Fellow students included **Hugh Ramsey**, **Max Meldrum**, **Norman Macgeorge** and **Violet Teague**.

ADELAIDE

1899

Set up a studio in the centre of Adelaide, advertising classes in ‘portraits from life in oils or watercolours, from miniatures or photographs’, and provided life models twice a week for her female students which included **Helen Fowler Stewart**, **Lotte Harry**, and **Bessie Davidson**.

Davidson subsequently lived, traveled and worked with Preston for nearly a decade

ADELAIDE

1907

McPherson and Davidson established a joint studio. Rejoined the South Australian Society of Arts as a fellow (listed as a council member, with **Hans Heysen**, in 1907–08) Became a prominent presence in the Adelaide art community.

11–12 March McPherson and Davidson held a joint exhibition of canvases achieved during their travels. The salon painting, *Onions*, McPherson's first work to enter a state art gallery, was acquired by the Art Gallery of South Australia in 1907 and *The tea urn* in 1909.

Recommended her teaching. **Isabella Gordon** recalled, 'I had arranged a study of a coloured bottle, some eggs and pomegranates all sitting up very sedately, but Miss MacPherson lost no time in cracking open the eggs, breaking open the fruit and scattering a few seeds around and then said "carry on"'

Students included **May Grigg**, **Gladys Reynell**, **Stella Bowen**, **Ellie Craven**, **Katie Allen Simpson** and **Hilda Snow**.

1909

Sale of McPherson's works did not provide a livelihood. The work of **Hans Heysen**, **James Ashton** and other landscapists dominated so McPherson accepted a teaching position at the Presbyterian Ladies' College, Adelaide.

1911

Feb Early exposure to Aboriginal art, through visits to the South Australian Museum and **Dr W Ramsey Smith's** lecture, 'Art and the Aborigine'.

April McPherson established a new studio with **Gladys Reynell**.



(From left) **Bessie Davidson**, **Gladys Reynell**, her first cousin **Donald Hankey**, **Margaret Preston** and **H Hankey** in *Faucogney-et-le Mer* in France 1912 Photographer unknown, courtesy of H Hopton

1913

April The Board of Governors of the state gallery commissioned McPherson (along with **Will Ashton** and landscapist **Hayley Lever**) to purchase artworks in Europe.

PARIS AND LONDON

1912

8 Feb McPherson and Reynell departed Adelaide for London. By April they had moved to Paris and renewed contact with both **Davidson** and **Bunny**.

June–July, McPherson and Reynell walked across the mountains of Alsace-Lorraine to Basel to view works by **Holbein** and **Breugel**.

1913

June–July painted at Ile de Noirmoutier, off the coast of Brittany. McPherson began to replace tone values with colour values, painting still lifes in pure high-keyed colours set in shallow space.

With £1500 of the Elder Bequest McPherson purchased Irish artist **William Orpen's** modern decorative painting *Sowing new seed* for the National Gallery of South Australia. The painting caused a public furore when exhibited in Adelaide and broke gallery attendance records

1914

Exhibited extensively in London (including the Royal Academy, New English Art Club, in Paris (at the New Salon) and in Pittsburgh, Liverpool and Adelaide.

Recommended teaching, attracting predominantly female students from St John's Wood Art School (including *Edith Collier*), offering solid training in painting and print techniques and the stimulation of strong opinions.

March–Oct Travelled to Ireland. Saw London's Royal Academy exhibition in May.



Margaret Preston and her dog 'Little Jim' c1915
Photographer unknown, Preston archive, Art Gallery of New South Wales

1916

April Painted with their students in the Cotswold village of Bibury. McPherson produced the major work *Sunshine*, which was later purchased by the AGNSW. Began to investigate various 'scientific' theories of colour, including colour-music synchrony.

McPherson and Reynell attended London's Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts to study pottery, skills later used at Seale-Hayne Neurological Military Hospital in Devon, where Reynell's brother neurologist Rupert implemented new psychological and physical treatments for shell-shocked soldiers.

McPherson and Reynell completed a 'war nursing course'.

8 Oct **William George Preston** (1881–1976) enlisted in the AIF at Victoria Barracks Sydney. Travelled to France as a gunner, selected to attend officer training courses in England, qualifying for a commission in the artillery as 2nd Lieutenant. Preston and McPherson reputedly met at the Vauxhall Bridge canteen for soldiers and sailors around August 1917 or after May 1918.

1917

June Consistently well reviewed by modern British critic Frank Rutter, who saw her still lifes as progressive, original and decorative.

1918

Moved to the Seale-Hayne hospital in Devon. McPherson also possibly documented (in drawings) the facial features of wounded soldiers 'where the camera could not penetrate'.

1919

20 Jan William Preston was discharged in London. In March they left for Australia. McPherson travelled to Adelaide to organise a joint exhibition with Reynell and her marriage to William Preston.

31 Dec Margaret Rose McPherson married William George Preston.

In explanation of an unusual act in the context of the era's professional women artists, she explained her name change: *'If my art was such that it was merely sustained on past successes, and could not attract attention under a new name, it was time for me to give up painting.'*



Margaret and William Preston in Mosman c1921
Photographer unknown, National Gallery of Australia, courtesy of the artist's family

Margaret Preston's house at 11 Park Avenue Mosman (rear view)
Photograph by Ian Peacey

SYDNEY

1920

The Prestons settled in Mosman, Sydney. Preston an immediate success, with re-exhibited European paintings and a new series of decorative still lifes.

She established an active program of exhibiting. *Summer* and *Nasturtiums* were purchased by the AGNSW.

Art entrepreneur **Sydney Ure Smith**, president of the NSW Society of Artists, AGNSW trustee and publisher of *Art in Australia*, and the *Home* became one of Preston's greatest supporters and a partner in the astute marketing of her art and opinions.

1923

First voiced her platform for a specifically modern national art under a modernist primitivism.

Her artistic output was prolific and continued into the 1930s.

Astutely, Preston and Ure Smith marketed her modernised-Australianised prints extensively as reasonably priced original artworks ideal for the interiors of modern flat-dwellers. **Thea Proctor**, was introduced to her woodblock prints by **Basil Burdett**.

The Prestons made the first of many trips throughout the NSW countryside and to New Guinea.

Preston published the major autobiographical essay, **'Why I became a convert to modern art'**.

6 Oct – 3 Nov Preston included in a major exhibition of Australian art. Preston and Proctor's works favourably seen as the only modern works in the exhibition.

1924

Published a joint article with Thea Proctor; 'The gentle art of arranging flowers' **Harold Cazneaux** photographed Preston for the *Home* magazine.

8 July Lectured on 'Modern art' at Sydney University, successfully exhibited in Adelaide and Sydney.

Oct Published 'Colour', establishing a public role as a colour theorist. Lectured to the students of **Dattilo Rubbo** and the Five Arts Club.

Dec Published **'Art for crafts: Aboriginal art artfully applied'** advocating the use of appropriated designs in domestic objects.

1925

March Produced an Aboriginal-art inspired cover for *Art in Australia*, published **'The Indigenous art of Australia'**.

April Wrote a catalogue foreword for **Roland Wakelin's** solo exhibition at Macquarie Galleries.

Nov Preston and Proctor's joint exhibition of colour woodblock prints in Chinese/Japanese-inspired red lacquer frames.

Late Dec Left Sydney for three months in Southeast Asia. Preston, an increasingly active travel writer, published an account of their trip, 'There and back in three months'.

1927

March–April Published, **'What is to be our national art'**, for the small student magazine *Undergrowth*.

Oct Spent six weeks traveling through North Queensland. Major Aboriginal inspired paintings and a series of 'Aboriginalised' gouache designs followed.

Dec The comprehensive 'Margaret Preston' special number of *Art in Australia* published, including Preston's **'From eggs to Electrolux'**, and enthusiastic articles on her work by **A Radcliffe-Brown** and **Thea Proctor**.

Executed a series of radically simplified still lifes, influenced by **Fernand Léger** and the impact of Aboriginal art.

1928

Preston exhibited widely and delivered public lectures.

Around July she underwent surgery (a mastectomy) for cancer.

Sept *Australian Gum blossom* (claimed by British novelist Somerset Maugham as the best of her pictures) purchased by the AGNSW.

Dec Published 'Australian artists versus art'.

1929

July The first major exhibition of Aboriginal art held in Australia, *Australian Aboriginal art* mounted at the Museum of Victoria, Melbourne.

Aug Held a major solo exhibition at Grosvenor Galleries.

Sept *Wheel flower*, which she considered one of her best prints featured on the cover of *Art in Australia*.

Dec Ure Smith and Leon Gellert published *Margaret Preston recent paintings 1929*, a deluxe portfolio featuring Preston's provocative artistic manifesto, '92 aphorisms by Margaret Preston and others'.

Preston's exceptional position within the Sydney art establishment formalised by an invitation to paint a self-portrait for the AGNSW's collection (the first woman artist to be invited).

1930

Published 'The application of Aboriginal designs', a practical guide to applying Aboriginal designs to domestic objects.

Harold Cazneaux completed a photographic essay on Preston in her Mosman garden.



Margaret and William Preston with unknown person in New Zealand c1930
Photographer unknown, National Gallery of Australia, gift through the National Gallery of Australia Foundation 1995

1931

Feb The First contemporary all Australian art exhibition in New York, included two Preston paintings.

1932

March –April Contributed oil paintings, drawings and prints to the exhibition Sydney Harbour Bridge celebrations.

June Published 'Meccano as an ideal'.

April the Prestons moved to Berowra, to a 5.7ha block, surrounded by natural bush.

One of the region's outstanding Aboriginal carvings of figures, animals and fish designs located very close to Preston's property, probably providing her first experience of Aboriginal artforms in the environment.

1933

June Travelled to the Pacific Islands for two months following Gauguin's trail. Preston's health continued to be an issue.

1934

12 April – Aug Travelled to China. The spectacular Yunnan landscape and Chinese 12th-century landscape painting traditions would have a substantial impact on her work.

July Visited Seoul and returned via Japan, briefly undertaking further instruction in the art of woodblock printing.

1936

May **Harold Cazneaux** completed a photographic essay on Preston at Berowra.

July Preston (with panels of wildflowers), **Adrian Feint**, **Justin O'Brien**, **Sali Herman** and **Douglas Annand** created work for the Orient line.

1937

May Preston's work included in the 1937 Empire exhibition, Royal Institute Galleries, London.

May – 7 Sept The Prestons travelled to America and thence through South America and Mexico.

Nov Published the major essay, 'American art under the New Deal: murals'.

June 1937 – July 1938 Preston's work included in the Australian Pavilion of the Paris Exposition. **Lloyd Rees**, **Lionel Lindsay** and **Preston** were awarded silver medals and **Norman Lindsay** a bronze.



Margaret Preston in her garden in Berowra 1937
Photograph by F J Halmarick, Fairfaxphotos

1938

Jan – April Preston represented by six paintings in the sesquicentenary exhibition 150 years of Australian art, at the invitation of AGNSW director **Will Ashton**. Became a founding member of the Australian Academy of Art.

May –Oct Preston's work included in the Empire exhibition, Glasgow. Contributed a chapter to the publication *The peaceful army: a memorial to the pioneer women of Australia 1788–1938*.

June–July Became the prestigious 'Carnegie lecturer' at the AGNSW, delivering five lectures on art history which were published in Art in Australia. Commenced work on 'the awful 6' – large panels for the Australian pavilion in the New York World Art Fair, 1939 a commission stipulating 'as many kinds as possible' of Australian wildflowers.

CLIFTON GARDENS, SYDNEY

Early 1939 The Prestons travelled to Hungary, Poland and possibly Russia.

April New York World Art Fair included Preston's six large paintings of Australian wildflowers in the Australian pavilion (later acquired by the New York Botanical Garden).

Aug The Prestons sold the Berowra property, rented 'Den o' Gwynne' at Clifton Gardens.

1 Sept France, Britain and Australia declared war on Germany. Preston lectured on the 1939 Herald exhibition of French and British Contemporary art at the AGNSW.

1940

July – Sept The Prestons travelled to Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia to view Aboriginal rock art sites.

Preston profoundly impressed by Wandjina sites in the Kimberley, mimih and 'x-ray' paintings in the Alligator River area.

Nov Preston published '**Paintings in Arnhem Land**' claiming the superiority of Aboriginal art over the art of other indigenous peoples.

1941

March Preston referred in correspondence to 'lecturing around Australia.' as part of her war effort.

May Preston published the article '**New developments in Australian art**'.

Aug An exhibition of Aboriginal art and its application opened at David Jones, Sydney involving objects and 'interesting lectures' (Preston's 'What I think about Aboriginal art'), Preston also exhibited six oil paintings. The display also featured five watercolours by Albert Namatjira (in his first Sydney exhibition).

2 Oct (until 5 July 1945) *Art of Australia Exhibition 1788–1941*, toured America and Canada, with an unprecedented presence of Aboriginal art. Preston's three paintings (*Australian native flowers* 1939, *Aboriginal still life* 1940 and *Aboriginal landscape* 1941) focal works in the show.



Margaret Preston: art & life Education Kit Art Gallery of New South Wales

1942

March – April, Preston and **William Dobell** exhibitions were shown at the AGNSW .

Major works by Preston acquired in the decade by the AGNSW, National Gallery of Victoria and Queensland Art Gallery.

23 June AGNSW trustees, with the Education Department, inaugurated educative scheme for school children, involving **Herbert Badham**, **Lyndon Dadswell**, **Eric Langker** and **Margaret Preston**.

Sept–Oct The Prestons travelled extensively through NSW and Queensland.

Oct 'Influence of Aboriginal art: Margaret Preston's paintings', published in the Studio, with an Aboriginalised cover by Preston.

1943

Dismissed Melbourne's '**Angry Penguins**' group, claiming they borrowed ideas concerning Aboriginal art from her.

1944

Sept In the Dobell Archibald controversy, Preston privately supported Macquarie Galleries director John Young (who opposed Dobell).

Dec Registered copyright and then published, 'Artists' groundwork', practical advice on artist materials.

1945

15 March – April Preston, a keen admirer of **Albert Namatjira's** work, spoke warmly at the opening of his watercolour exhibition at Anthony Hordern's Gallery.

Aug Produced a remarkable number of monotypes and colour stencil prints.

14 Aug Japan surrendered, ending World War II.

1946

1–28 March Included in the *Australia at war* exhibition. Her paintings and monotypes were included in the Unesco Exposition internationale d'art moderne in Paris in 1946.

April Manufacturer **Claudio Alcorso's** range of Modernage Fabrics featuring intrinsically Australian designs, promoted and displayed at David Jones, Sydney. Preston, one of around 30 artists commissioned to produce the designs.

Aug Showed work in the *Exhibition of Australian women painters* (AGNSW).

Oct delivered a paper to a panel discussion on 'Art and architecture' Began on a series of approximately 100 monotypes.

1947

July–Nov Embarked on a 16 000km overland journey through Queensland, Central Australia, the Northern Territory and Western Australia to view Aboriginal art, rock painting and carving sites.

Collected ochres to grind into paints, acquired artworks such as barks, carved sculptures. Many were given to institutions in 1948.

1949

The major publication, **Margaret Preston's monotypes**, edited by **Sydney Ure Smith** published as one of Smith's last projects before his death in October.

Aug Became an expert member of the working party formed by the Australian UNESCO Committee for Visual Arts. *Banksia* 1938 presented to the AGNSW by the Society of Artists in memory of **Sydney Ure Smith**.

The Prestons embarked on an extended European tour.

Installation photograph of *Art of Australia exhibition 1788–1941* at Yale University Art Gallery, USA 1941
Photographer unknown, Preston archive, Art Gallery of New South Wales

KILLARNEY STREET, MOSMAN

1952

March The Prestons moved to Mosman.

Oct judged the Mosman Art Prize, awarding it to **Grace Cossington Smith** for painting and **Weaver Hawkins** for watercolour.

1953

Sept Preston's major solo exhibition, opened by **Bernard Smith**.

1954

The Prestons travelled for six months through Europe and the Middle East.

1955

Nov Delivered the opening address for **Elisabeth MacIntyre's** exhibition of 'walkabout' drawings and pottery, Craftsman Studio, Sydney.

1956–59

Jan 1956 The Prestons departed for Asia and India, then in the artist's 82nd year they traveled around Africa. Preston retaining her sense of humour, wrote of her health – 'heart trouble, too much Art'.

Sept–Dec 1958 Delivered probably her last public lecture, 'Aboriginal paintings – Arnhem Land', at the AGNSW.

1961–63

Preston made life member of the Society of Artists in 1961.

Oct 1962 hospitalised.

28 May 1963 she died at Mosman Private Hospital.

Adapted from D Edwards & R Peel, *Margaret Preston*, AGNSW, Sydney 2005

Margaret and William Preston c1954
National Gallery of Australia, courtesy of J S Gorman



THEME SOURCE SHEET:

The Tireless Traveller

Margaret Preston was a tireless traveller. Over her eighty-eight years she travelled both nationally and internationally.

Preston's constant urge to travel, learning about new and interesting parts of the world is indicative of her free, independent spirit and a desire to always move beyond what is known. These experiences developed her understanding of Australian and world culture. This no doubt informed her art practice and its subject matter, as well as her ideas and beliefs about Australian national identity.

The heat of Sydney drove us to the tropics. We two left about December 20th with a destination unknown; even to ourselves. All we had provided was a ticket each to Singapore, a cabin trunk, two suit cases, a rug or two, and the right to break the journey where we wished. A three month trip, travelling in ten steamers, money well spent and health never better.

Margaret Preston 'There and back in Three Months', *The Home*, Vol. 7, No. 10 October 1926



Right: Prestons passport

Below left: Margaret Preston in Angkor 1926 Photographer unknown, National Gallery of Australia, gift through National Gallery of Australia Foundation 1955

Below right: Margaret and William Preston at the Loyalty Islands Photographer unknown, National Gallery of Australia, gift through National Gallery of Australia Foundation 1955





Map: key destination in Preston's tireless travelling.

Travel International

1904 Adelaide for Munich via Colombo, the Suez Canal and Naples. Paris, England, Scotland and Netherlands, returning to Paris.

1906 England and Ireland. Spain via Tangier, Morocco. Algieras, Seville, Toledo and Madrid. Adelaide via Rome and Naples.

1912 Adelaide for London via Durban, South Africa. Moved to Paris.

1913 Moved to London.

1914 Bunmahon, County Waterford. Ireland. Returned to London a month after World War 1 declared.

1918 With William Preston: England for Australia, via North America.

1920 Norfolk and Lord Howe islands. Settled in Mosman, Sydney.

1925 Southeast Asia: Macassar, Bali, Java, Singapore, Malay Peninsula, Siam and Cambodia (Angkor) and Saigon. Hong Kong to Macao and mainland China. Sydney via the Philippines, Thursday Island, the Albany Pass and the Whitsunday Passage

1933 The Pacific Islands following Gauguin's trail: Tahiti and Hiva-oa ('Gauguin's Island') in the Marquesas.

1927 New Caledonia and New Hebrides.

1934 China via Hong Kong, Haiphong, Hanoi and the Yunnan province. Peking and the Great Wall of China.

Seoul, Korea, returning via Japan.

1937 America: New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco, South America and Mexico, Brazil via Rio de Janeiro, Uruguay, Argentina and Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala and Mexico.

1939 Hungary, Poland and Russia.

1950 Europe: London, Morocco, Casablanca, Tangier, Spain, Portugal, Marseilles, Paris, Italy, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Holland.

1954 Europe and the Middle East: London, Lebanon and Cyprus, Greece, Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Jerusalem, Damascus and Persia.

1954 and **1955** London.

1956 Asia: India, Nepal, Kashmir and Ceylon.

1957 Madagascar, Rhodesia, Kenya, Mauritius, Uganda and the Congo, returning via South Africa.

1958 Preston makes her last trip, to India.

Travel: Australia

1923 New South Wales: Port Macquarie, Myall and Wallis lakes, Newcastle. New Guinea.

1927 Queensland: Rockhampton, Cairns, the Atherton Tableland, the Daintree, Cape York Peninsula, Innisfail, Herberton, Cardwell and the Great Barrier Reef.

1940 Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia: Arnhem Land's Oenpelli (Gunbalanya), and Bathurst and Melville islands.

1941 Olary-Yunta region in South Australia, viewing Aboriginal rock art.

1942 New South Wales and Queensland.

1947 Queensland, Central Australia, the Northern Territory and Western Australia: Carnarvon Gorge, Qld, Flinders and McDonnell Ranges (Simpson's Gap and Standley Chasm), Alice Springs, Palm Valley, Mount Doreen to the Granites, Tennant Creek and 'the marbles', Katherine, Eusey Falls, Mataranka, the Rupert, Victoria, Alligator, Leichhardt and Roper river areas, the Kimberley, Darwin, Groote Eylandt, Rossel and Chasm islands.



Margaret Preston and group from the Grace-Line arriving in South American port 1937. Photographer unknown, National Gallery of Australia, gift through the National Gallery of Australia Foundation 1995

THEME SOURCE SHEET:

Fanatical Botanical

Throughout Margaret Preston's career she was fanatical about the botanical. The artist focused a large part of her practice on the then marginalised genre of still-life and the traditional and decorative subject matter of flowers and plants. There are approximately 186 art works in the exhibition *Margaret Preston: art and life* that use botanical subject matter, with approximately 155 different types of native and non-native flora identified.

Flowers should be arranged to express something. Thus, when you come into a darkened room on a hot Australian day, and gradually discover for yourself a single lovely white flower in a cool silver vase, how much more restful and beautiful than to find a heaped pot of scarlet geraniums, Iceland poppies, etc.

Margaret Preston with Thea Proctor, 'The Gentle art of arranging flowers', *The Home* Vol. , No. 2 June 1924

Botanical subjects: a selection used by Preston

Acacia (wattle)	Lily, Macropidia (kangaroo paw)
Actinotus major (flannel flower)	Magnolia
Agapanthus	Melaluca (paper bark)
Anigozanthos (kangaroo paw)	Narcissus
Banksia ericifolia (candlestick banksia)	Nasturtiums
Blandfordia grandiflora (Christmas bells)	Orchid cactus
Boronia serrulata (native rose)	Pansies
Brachychiton acerifolius (flame tree)	Petunias
Camellia	Poppies
Carnation	Primula (primrose)
Ceratopetalum gummiferum (Christmas bush)	Ranunculus (buttercup)
Convolvulus (morning glory)	Rhododendron/Azalea
Daisies, Erythrina (coral tree)	Rose
Eucalyptus	Stenocarpus salignus (fire-wheel tree)
Forget-me nots	Swainsona formosa (Sturt's desert pea)
Geranium	Sydney Rock Orchid
Grevillea (red spider flower)	Telopea speciosissima (waratah)
Heath or Leptospermum (tea tree)	Tiger lily
Hibiscus pentaphyllus	Tulips
Hydrangeas	Voilets
Isopogon (drumsticks)	Xanthorrhoea inflorescence (grass tree)

When I'm painting flowers I'll pull one of its kind to pieces. I will know exactly how it's formed. When I've done this I draw from another one – I do this with all my flowers. I make studies of them. I then put the studies entirely away from me and make my compositions

Margaret Preston, Australian Artists speak' Radio 2FC 1945



Australian gum blossom

1928

oil on canvas, 55.5 x 55.5cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales. Purchased 1928

Flowers: *Eucalyptus*



Monstera deliciosa

1934
oil on canvas, 41.1 x 53.4cm
Bendigo Art Gallery

Flowers: *Philodendron monstera* (previously known as *Monstera deliciosa*)



Australian Rock lily

1933
oil on canvas, 45.8 x 50.9cm
Buda Collection. Castlemaine Art Gallery of Historical Museum

Flowers: *Dendrobium* (rock orchid, rock lily)



Banksia cobs

1933
oil on canvas, 45.8 x 53.2 cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales. Gift of Mr Howard Sherrard 1982

Flowers: *Banksia* fruits

THEME SOURCE SHEET:

Indigenous Art and National Identity

Margaret Preston pursued a life long interest in the study of Australian indigenous art and culture as a pathway to a distinctly Australian national identity.

Through the prism of modernism, Preston adapted, adopted and appropriated Aboriginal objects, signs and symbols into her art practice. Preston was the first serious advocate of Aboriginal art and promoted it widely through her writings and lectures.

Today Preston's strategy is met by mixed responses and a more critical debate by both indigenous and non-indigenous people.

In wishing to rid myself of the mannerisms of a country other than my own I have gone to the art of a people who had never seen or known anything different from themselves ... These are the Australian Aboriginals and it is only from the art of such people in any land that a national art can spring

Margaret Preston, 'The Indigenous Art of Australia', *Art in Australia* March 1925

Below: Margaret Preston's plane Oenpelli at Alligator River

Bottom left: Rock art near Berrora

Bottom right: Aboriginal Art Artfully Applied – page of article



The Brown pot 1940 Art Gallery of New South Wales, purchased 1942

Art is the tangible symbol of the spirit of a country ... What is Australia going to offer to the world as her contribution to the Arts?

Margaret Preston, 'What is to be our National Art?' *Undergrowth* March April 1927



THEME SOURCE SHEET:

The Machine Age

From her birth in the late 19th century to her death in the middle of the 20th century Margaret Preston lived through times of great change.

During this time Australian society experienced the rapid rise of a modern consumer culture, which Preston often called the 'machine age', where in both public and private life, new technologies infiltrated everyday experience.

Nothing symbolised this age in Australia more than the building and opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge in 1932. True to form, Preston both celebrated and criticised this engineering feat through participating in an exhibition dedicated to its opening, while characterising it negatively in her writings as an 'imported toy'.



Still Life 1927

Sydney, New South Wales, has built for itself some of the finest specimens of Meccano art in the world. One, a great towering structure that sends everything around it out of perspective ... Our Bridge ... seems to be the culmination of the worship of ironbound realism that has ruled the art of Australia generally ... Here in a country geographically and climatically different to any other country, and with its own national characteristics, an imported toy is its ideal

Margaret Preston on the Sydney Harbour Bridge, 'Meccano as an ideal' *Manuscripts* No. 2 1932

She knows that the time has come to express her surroundings in her work. All around her in the simple domestic life is machinery – patent ice chests that need no ice, machinery does it; irons heated by invisible heat; washing-up machines; electric sweepers and so on. They all surround her and influence her mind ...

Margaret Preston, 'From Eggs to Electrolux', *Art in Australia* December 1927



Bottom left: **The Bridge from a ferryboat** c1932 Art Gallery of New South Wales

Left: **Sydney today** Photographer Eric Riddler

Below: **Sydney bridge** c1932 Art Gallery of New South Wales



THEME SOURCE SHEETS:

Sydney City Sights and Sites

Margaret Preston was an artist who celebrated the locations in which she worked and lived. Although she was born in Adelaide and studied in Melbourne, upon her return from Europe in 1919, she made Sydney her permanent home for the rest of her forty four years.

Preston's images of Sydney are both beautiful artworks and valuable documents of record. Today considered iconic images of the harbour city, they offer the viewer an insight into how this dynamic, international city has changed, but curiously and in a way reassuringly, how it has in many ways also stayed the same.

If you wish to see the world, see Australia. There are so many trips to be made in this country that to choose is very difficult, but this is one that is easy to make, does not take much time and is really interesting. It is taken from Port Macquarie, NSW to Sydney by smooth waterways ... Newport is the landing place and from there to Manly and then by boat to Sydney, ends a trip full of beauty and simplicity.

Margaret Preston, 'An ideal Australian Tour', *The Home*, Vol. 7, No. 11.1, November 1926



Key Art works:

Mosman Bridge, NSW c1927
woodcut, hand-coloured,
25.2 x 18.7 cm image; i)
33.6 x 24.9 cm sheet; ii)
28.6 x 21.4 cm sheet
Art Gallery of New South
Wales, bequest of Margaret
Preston via Estate of
W G Preston 1986



Sydney Heads (2) 1925
woodcut, hand-coloured,
24.4 x 18 cm image;
34.4 x 24.3 cm (irreg) sheet
Art Gallery of New South
Wales, gift of Mrs Alison Brown



The bridge, Spit, North Sydney c1927
woodcut, hand-coloured,
27.6 x 19.9 cm image;
36.5 x 27.6 cm sheet
Private collection



Circular Quay 1925
woodcut, hand-coloured,
24.8 x 24.4 cm image;
34.8 x 29.5 cm sheet
Art Gallery of New South
Wales, purchased 1964



Circular Quay today
Photographer Eric Riddler



Harbour foreshore 1925
woodcut, hand-coloured,
24.8 x 18.5 cm image; i)
28.3 x 21.2 cm sheet; ii)
29 x 22 cm sheet
Art Gallery of New South
Wales, gift of Mrs Alison Brown
1968



Corner of Mosman Bay 1929
oil on canvas, 52.5 x 45.8 cm
National Gallery of Victoria,
Melbourne, purchased through
The Art Foundation of Victoria
with assistance of Westpac
Banking Corporation, Founder
Benefactor 1997



Corner of Mosman Bay today
Photographer Eric Riddler

THEME SOURCE SHEET:

War! What is it good for?

Margaret Preston experienced war and its effects through both World War 1 (1914-1918) and World War 2 (1939 – 1945).

During World War 1 Preston was in Europe and saw first hand the devastating effects of new industrialised and mechanised weaponry at a hospital for shell-shocked soldiers. The artist again experienced war in Australia during World War 2 and in a sudden change of subject matter, painted a significant triptych, *General Post Office Sydney*, 1942, *Japanese submarine exhibition* 1942 and *Tank Traps* 1943 that documented Sydney during this anxious time.

Preston, dismayed and angry at not just the events of the war but the insular and suspicious culture it promoted in this country made vocal her feelings through essays and letters and even participated in the *Australia at war* exhibition which toured nationally in March 1946.

In 1916, British shell-shocked and injured soldiers started pouring in to England. This necessitated hospitals that were fitted to deal with their maladies ... The circumstances demanded the services of persons who were able to interest the men and to aid the doctors in ways that did not come under the heading of 'nursing'. Some of this work took the form of handicrafts. My own experience was gained in a shell-shock hospital situated on Dartmoor, England.

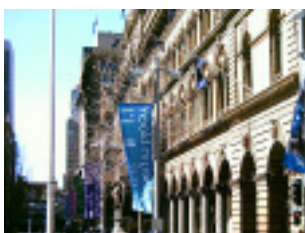
Margaret Preston, 'Crafts that Aid'. *Art in Australia*. 3rd Series, No 77, November 1939



Basket weaving class, Seale-Hayne Hospital, Devon (Preston and her dog Little Jim extreme right) 1918

The change in the world situation of Australia, made by the war, will compel her artists to readjust their relationship to the art of the European continent and Great Britain ... Australia will find herself at a corner of a triangle – the East ... will be at one point and the other ... representing the West. It will be in the choice of one of these corners that the future of Australian art will lie ... Which end of the triangle will Australian post-war artists take?

Margaret Preston, 'The Orientation of Art in the Post-War Pacific' in *Society or Artists Book* 1942. Sydney: Ure Smith 1942



General Post Office Sydney
1942
oil on canvas, 43 x 53 cm
Art Gallery of South Australia,
Adelaide, South Australian
Government Grant 1978

Left: General Post office today



Japanese submarine exhibition 1942

oil on canvas, 43.2 x 50.8 cm
Art Gallery of New South Wales, gift of Mr W G Preston the artist's
widower 1967

THEME SOURCE SHEET:

Publish or perish

Margaret Preston published approximately forty-one articles during her lifetime on subjects as varied as art practice, modernism, Aboriginal art, nationalism, travel, design, and home decoration, and even flower arranging. A selected reference list in this kit includes many of her key articles.

She also designed covers for magazines as diverse as *Art in Australia*, *Home* magazine, the *Wentworth* magazine and *Women's World* magazine as well as appearing in numerous articles sharing her points of view as a major Sydney social identity.

Preston seemed to understand the value of a constant presence in the media, particularly print. Her public persona as an artist, Sydney social identity and cultural thinker was championed by long time friend, Sydney Ure Smith, editor of *Art in Australia* and *Home* magazines.

92 Aphorisms by Margaret Preston and others

During December 1929, Sydney Ure Smith published *Margaret Preston Recent Paintings 1929*, a deluxe portfolio highlighting many of the paintings and some woodblock prints from a 1929 solo exhibition at Grosvenor Galleries, Sydney.

The publication featured Preston's provocative artistic manifesto, *92 aphorisms by Margaret Preston and others*, which cumulatively described her artistic values and included many of her now famous statements and claims. Here is a selection.

Painting is a personal matter; it should be judged from the point of view of the artist. Aphorism 11

The work of a generation is not really understood before the coming of the generation which follows. Aphorism 34

An artist's evolution should always be in relation to himself and independent of outside forces. Aphorism 61

To be lucid, to know of what one is capable is the first thing of importance for the artist. Aphorism 68



Left to right: *Home* magazine Feb 1929; *Woman's World* Aug 1 1926; *Wentworth* magazine Aug 1928

Bottom left: *Basket weaving for armatures* article

Bottom right: *There and back again in three months* article



The exhibition

CURATORIAL PERSPECTIVES

Margaret Preston: more than 'a flower painter'

Preston, understanding the capacity of technique to inscribe content, remained an exceptional and consistently innovative technician. Within the coherency of her vision, her unceasing experimentation produced a body of work constantly shifting between modernism's drives to abstraction and geometricism and the traditions of representation' between the internationalist pull of modernist investigation and the inflections of a consciously nationalist art. The view that this produced art of profound significance has been rarely debated, although the question of Preston's modernism has engaged historians. One side of the debate saw the artist as the one who defined modernism between the wars in her persistent attempt to engage with the complex problems which gave rise to its forms. In contrast, the other saw her as the creator of little more than a "cosy modernism," "an admixture of latter-day Japonisme" and "Aboriginisme."

Notwithstanding the clarity of her art, in her accommodation of a range of positions Margaret Preston proved a difficult artist to categorise. She split her contemporaries into a number of camps' her work has subsequently engendered a multiplicity of opinions and interpretations from art historians, cultural and feminist historians, indigenous writers and anthropologists. She wrote in clearly modernist terms on the needs and future of Australian art, and yet produced many paintings which veered little from acceptable representational modes.

In relation to her attitudes, one can argue Preston as a quintessentially modern woman of the era, as a Victorian, or as a woman in advance of the prevailing views of her time. Her relationships with Aboriginal art have been seen as prescient and as crudely appropriative. Her negotiations with the Sydney establishment have been interpreted as highly political and significantly constrained. Her art embodied a commitment to control and rational orders, yet she also understood it as expressive and she consistently described her search for "the national" in terms of the spiritual. She remained a feminist, keenly interested in women's issues and art, and yet, once married, also insistently presented herself as a homemaker. While her formalist position dictated the irrelevancy of subject, she nonetheless sustained her commitment to the egalitarian forms of the still life.

If her practice subverts the notion of simple dualities, Preston ultimately emerges as a commanding strategist in the history of Australian art. The artist courted the Sydney establishment and aimed for, and achieved, formidable success in its terms; at the same time she saw her art as set against its enclosed fraternity. One could argue that Preston took a traditional female pursuit and subverted it, thereby succeeding in painting the abstract indicators of a national art in the form of the most decoratively splendid flower paintings of the interwar decades. Similarly with her "Aboriginalised" landscapes, monotypes and prints of the 1940s and 50s, it can be argued that Preston worked both within and against the Australian landscape tradition to produce some of the most significant landscapes created in this country. Each will be highlighted in this wider focus on an exceptional artist.

Deborah Edwards and Rose Peel: co-curators of *Margaret Preston: art and life*. Excerpt first published in *LOOK Magazine*, Art Gallery Society of New South Wales, June 2005, pp24-29.

FACTS AND FIGURES

200 works in total

By Margaret Preston:

96 paintings
22 monoprints
6 ceramics

By Gladys Reynell:

1 print
9 ceramics

By Edith Collier:

1 print

All works are from the period 1901 to 1955

193 works in total from Australia:

133 from Australian Public Gallery collections
60 from Australian Private collections

57 works from the Art Gallery of New South Wales permanent collection (there are 113 works in total by Margaret Preston in the Gallery's collection)

7 works in total form International collections:

4 private collections
3 public collections

10 exhibition spaces organised chronologically, guided by broad themes:

Post-impressionism
Concepts of decorative arts
Visions of Sydney
Relationships to Aboriginal art
Preston as landscapist

The exhibition took 5 ? years from conception to installation to opening and will run for 11 weeks from Friday 29 July to Sunday 23 October 2005

The exhibition will tour nationally to:

National Gallery of Victoria – 12 November 2005 to 29 January 2006
Queensland Art Gallery – 18 February to 7 May 2006
Art Gallery of South Australia – 26 May – 13 August 2006

Last major Margaret Preston solo exhibition in Australia:

Art Gallery of South Australia, 1980

THE EXHIBITION PROCESS

3 -4 years from exhibition opening

- Curators develop an exhibition proposal for a retrospective on Margaret Preston and a catalogue raisonné of Preston's paintings, monotypes and craftwork after extensive research on the artist.
- Curators seek and document works in private collections as part of their ongoing research for this project.
- Curators send letters to all state and regional galleries in Australia to gather information on Preston works in public collections.
- Curators conduct a large mail out to colleagues in state galleries as well as to commercial gallery owners and to auctions houses to advise on project and for feedback on the whereabouts of works.
- Curators develop draft budget for entire process of generating and presenting the exhibition and producing an accompanying monograph on Margaret Preston and catalogue raisonné.
- Curators continue their research on Preston, consulting various archives in Adelaide, Canberra, Melbourne Sydney and New Zealand and attempt to locate further information and material on the artist. A researcher is employed for a day a week to assist with this project.
- Research also continues on works for the catalogue raisonné list of paintings, monotypes and ceramics. This catalogue will attempt to list (and illustrate where possible) all known Preston works in these mediums as well as providing detailed provenance, exhibition and reproduction histories on each work.

2 years prior to the exhibition opening

- The curators intensify their search for Preston works in private collections including promoting the project through the media, published articles and various other outlets (both national and international).
- A flyer entitled 'seeking Margaret Preston paintings' is produced and mailed to various interstate commercial galleries and dealers for dispersal to their clients.
- A mail-out to schools in NSW is also conducted after initial works were located in these collections.
- Curators organise a large mail-out to all museums and galleries in England, Ireland and Canada to enquire if there are any Preston works in their collection.
- Curators liaise with staff at auction houses and commercial galleries to conduct an extensive mail-out to collectors who have purchased Preston works. Curators follow up responses, viewing and documenting works which have resulted from this search.
- The curators travel interstate and to New Zealand to view all works in public collections as well as works which have been located in private collections.
- Works are evaluated for potential inclusion in the exhibition and are catalogued and documented for the catalogue raisonné of paintings.
- During interstate travel, curators also visit libraries and archival collections for further research on Preston, and interview those who knew the artist.
- The curators liaise with all Gallery departments (Curatorial, Conservation, Registration, Exhibition, Public Programmes, Installation, Workshop, Gallery Shop, Sponsorship, Marketing, and Graphics) that will contribute to the development of the exhibition to inform them of the scope of the project and to initiate discussion concerning their involvement.
- Exhibitions co-ordinator organises the application for 'Visions of Australia' (a Federal Government funding body for the arts) exhibition development grant.
- Towards April/May 2004, curators spend some time discussing and compiling a preliminary list of works for the exhibition.
- Curators initiate discussion with staff from the Royal Botanic Gardens for a joint series of public programmes in conjunction with the exhibition. Negotiations are also made with the Gardens' staff for their assistance in identifying all plants in Preston paintings, a list of which will be included in the catalogue raisonné of paintings.

1 year prior to the opening

- Formal letters from the Gallery Director are sent requesting the loan of works for the exhibition and tour.
- Exhibitions staff finalise agreements with touring venues.
- A group of ten writers to contribute short essays on key works for the exhibition catalogue are selected and contacted.
- Royal Botanic Gardens staff come to the Gallery on the weekly basis and continue to identify the plants in Preston paintings.
- Curators commence writing essays for the exhibition catalogue and consolidating text for the catalogue raisonné list.
- Exhibition co-ordinator organises application for 'Visions' touring grant.
- Photographs and illustrations are ordered for the exhibition catalogue and photography is organised for all works in private collections where images are unavailable.
- Works are also photographed and images sourced for paintings, monotypes and ceramics in the catalogue raisonné.
- Once lenders respond to the initial request, formal loan contracts are sent out by registrations staff.
- Marketing staff approach potential sponsors and supports for the exhibition.

6 months prior to exhibition opening

- Final drafts for essays and catalogue raisonné text are submitted and editing commences.
- Graphic designers commence work on the exhibition catalogue and the CD-ROM catalogue raisonné in ongoing discussion with curators.
- Curators provide all departments, including public programmes, marketing and public relations with all information required for education kits, sponsorship packages and press releases.
- Public programmes staff develop a range of education programmes and resources as well as events for the general public to support the exhibition.
- Press releases on the exhibition are distributed to the media.
- Transport/ freight schedules are organised by registration staff.
- A marketing programme for the exhibition is finalised and graphic designers work on posters, banners and other related material for promotion of the exhibition.
- Curators devise the design of the exhibition space.
- Installation and workshop departments are briefed on display requirements.
- Public programmes staff work on biographical film on Preston, to appear at the entrance to the exhibition.
- The Senior Coordinators in Public Programmes and the curators organise speakers for the symposium, exhibition floor talks and other related events at the Gallery during the period of the exhibition.
- Material is selected and organised for display cabinets in the exhibition.

1 month prior to the opening

- Installation and Workshop departments commence carpentry and architecture for the exhibition installation process which includes:
 - production of all plinths and cabinets
 - 1 week to demount previous exhibition, which occupied the temporary exhibition space
 - 1-1/2 weeks to rebuild according to curators' design, which involves building walls, rooms, adding architectural features and painting walls (after curators select colours in consultation with Gallery painter)
- Exhibition works arrive at the Gallery and conservation staff unpack, examine and condition report all artworks. Condition of works will be monitored throughout their display and travel. Conservation work (such as re-framing or cleaning works) is undertaken where required after consulting the lenders.
- Curators and public programmes officer write didactic panels for the exhibition which is extracted from the curators' text.
- Invitation list for the exhibition opening is compiled and invitations are sent out.
- Marketing programs begin to engage the public with the exhibition.

Thursday 29 July 2005: exhibition opens to the public

1 month after the exhibition opening

- An exhibition de-brief meeting examining the entire process and the resulting exhibition is held with all contributing departments.
- An information summary with copies of all publications, programs and media coverage linked to the exhibition is distributed to all lenders of artworks.

Collection connections

PRESTON AT THE ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

The Art Gallery of New South Wales holds one hundred and thirteen works by Margaret Preston in its collection across a range of media including painting, printmaking and ceramics that date between the 1910s and the 1950s.

Inquiry Activity

Investigate the diverse nature of Preston's work held in the Gallery's collection through the online collection search at: www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection

Collate a list of works by decades and media. Identify where the works in the Gallery's collection would be situated within the exhibition *Margaret Preston: art and life*. Outline and discuss the rationale behind your choices.

Research and investigate the works by Preston held in the permanent collection of other State Galleries.



CONNECTING PRESTON ACROSS THE COLLECTION

The works on the following pages are from the Art Gallery of New South Wales Collection they are categorised by themes relevant to the investigation of the body of work and art practice of Margaret Preston.

They are starting points for developing connections, contrasts and discussion across media, subject matter, technique and formal qualities. They also suggest approaches for working with any State Gallery's permanent collection

Images and information for the works listed can be sourced from the Gallery's *Collection Handbooks* the Permanent Collection Education Kits: *Focus on Photography*, *Encounters with Contemporary*, *Aspects of Australian Art and Adventures in Asia*, the *Gallery's Research Library and Archive* and the *Online Collection search*.

Inquiry Activity

Create an online exhibition focussing on one of the themes related to Margaret Preston using My Virtual Gallery www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/mvg

In your exhibition select works by Preston and other artists from the Gallery's collection. Present your exhibition with a title, key images and text panels. You may use the themes presented in this kit or others including: *The role of Women*, *Consumer Culture*, *modernism and Genres in Art (Still life, Self portrait and Landscape)*

Installation photograph of Margaret Preston and William Dobell loan exhibition, Art Gallery of New South Wales 1942

Photographer unknown, Research library and Archive, Art Gallery of New South Wales





The Tireless Traveller

Kanô School (Japan)

The arrival of the Portuguese

late 16th century-early 17th century

single six-fold screen; ink and colours on gold-leafed paper

152.0 x 369.0cm image; 152.0 x 370.2cm screen

Purchased 1996

John Peter Russell (Australia 1858 – 1930)

Rough Sea, Morestil

circa 1900

soil on canvas on hardboard

66.0 x 81.8cm

Purchased 1968



Russell Drysdale (Australia 1912 – 1981)

Sofala

1947

oil on canvas on hardboard

71.7 x 93.1cm board; 91.2 x 112.2 x 6.5cm frame

Purchased 1952

John Olsen (Australia b. 1928)

Spanish Encounter

1960

triptych: oil on hardboard

triptych: 183.0 x 366.0cm board overall; 185.0 x 367.4 x 5.0cm

frame overall

Purchased 1960

Russell Drysdale **Sofala** 1947

John Olsen **Spanish Encounter** 1960

Willy Tjungurrayi (Australia, b. 1936)

Walungurru Northern Territory

Tingari Story

1986

synthetic polymer paint on linen canvas

240.0 x 360.0cm stretcher

Mollie Gowing Acquisition Fund for Contemporary Aboriginal Art

1993

Guan Wei (China;Australia, b.1957)

Revisionary

1998

26 panels; synthetic polymer paint on canvas

installation dimensions variable according to wall size

Purchased with funds provided by the Rudy Komon Memorial

Fund 1999



Fanatical Botanical

Yamamoto BAIITSU (Japan, b.1783, d.1856)

Birds and flowers of the four seasons

1847

pair of six-fold screens; ink and colour on paper

each screen: 160.0 x 363.2cm image; 175.5 x 380.2cm screen

Purchased 1982

W.B.Gould (Australia, 1803-1853)

Flowers and fruit

1849

oil on canvas

65.8 x 76.8cm

Purchased 1956

Lucien Henry (Australia, 1850 – 1896)

Waratah

1887

oil on wood

51.0 x 35.0cm board; 68.3 x 52.4 x 4.5cm frame

Gift of Marcel Aurousseau 1983

Donald Friend (Australia, 1915 – 1989)

An exotic garden viewed at different levels

1957

oil and mixed media on pair of doors with glass panels

two doors: each door 183.0 x 45.0cm; 183.0 x 90.0cm overall;

192cm x 96.5cm x 16.9cm frame

Purchased 1988



Emily Kame Kngwarreye (Australia, 1916 – 1996)

Central and Western Desert/Northern Territory

Untitled (Alhalkere)

1992

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

165.0 x 480.0 x 4.0cm stretcher

Mollie Gowing Acquisition Fund for Contemporary Aboriginal Art

1992

Fiona Hall (Australia, b.1953)

Cash crop

1998

carved soap, painted bank notes in a vitrine

Vitrine: 114.0 x 130.3 x 54.2cm

Plinth: 57.2 x 60.0 x 132.2cm

Purchased with funds provided by the Contemporary Collection Benefactors' Program 2000

Lucien Henry **Waratah** 1887

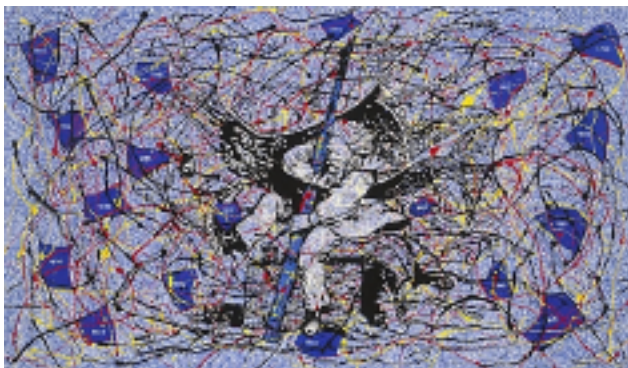
Fiona Hall **Cash crop** 1998



Indigenous Art and National Identity

Albert Namatjira (Australia, 1902-1959)
Central Australia, Northern Territory
Palm Valley
1940s
Watercolour
37.0 x 54.2cm image/sheet
Purchased 1986

Laurie Mungatopi (b.circa1923)
Bob One Apuatimi (1925-1976)
Big Jack Yaunga (circa1910-1973)
Don Burakmadjua (1925-1995)
Charlie Quiet (b.circa 1905)
Unknown
Melville and Bathurst islands, Northern Territory, Australia
Tutini (Pukumani grave posts)
1958
natural pigments on iron wood
147.3 to 274.2cm in height
Gift of Dr Stuart Scougall



Mervyn Bishop **Prime Minister Gough Whitlam pours soil into the hands of traditional land owner Vincent Lingiari, Northern Territory** 1975

Gordon Bennett **Myth of the western man (white man's burden)** 1992

Mervyn Bishop (Australia, b.1945)
Prime Minister Gough Whitlam pours soil into the hands of traditional land owner Vincent Lingiari, Northern Territory
1975 (printed later)
1999 (printed)
type R3 photograph
type R3 photograph
30.5 x 30.5cm image; 33.9 x 33.9cm sheet

Imants Tillers (Australia, b.1950)
Pataphysical man
1984
synthetic polymer paint, charcoal and pencil on 168 canvas boards

Tim Johnson (Australia, b.1947)
Visualisation
1992
oil on canvas
304.0 x 532.0cm overall
Ewan Murray-Will Bequest Fund 1985

Gordon Bennett (Australia, b.1955)
Myth of the western man (white man's burden)
1992
Synthetic polymer paint on canvas
175.0 x 304.0cm stretcher
Purchased 1993



The Machine Age

Charles Bayliss (Australia, 1850-1897)
Shearing shed
 1886-1891
 albumen photograph
 13.0 x 20.0cm image/sheet
 Purchased 1984

Weaver Hawkins (United Kingdom; Australia, 1983-1977)
Morning Underground
 1922
 oil on canvas
 76.0 x 100.0cm stretcher; 96.7 x 120.7 x 6.5cm frame
 Purchased 1976



Grace Cossington Smith (Australia, b.1892, d.1984)
The curve of the bridge
 1928-1929
 oil on cardboard
 110.5 x 82.5cm board; 137.2 x 109.5 x 10.9cm frame
 Purchased with funds provided by the Art Gallery Society of New South Wales and James Fairfax 1991

Jessie Traill (Australia, 1881-1967)
Sydney Bridge IV: The ants' progress, November 1929. From the series Building the Harbour Bridge
 1929
 etching with fowl biting, brown ink on cream wove paper
 39.8 x 25.2cm platemark; 49.0 x 33.6cm sheet (irreg.)
 Purchased 1975

Werner Mantz (Germany; Netherlands, 1901-1983)
Glaspaleis (Schunck Department Store, Heerlen, The Netherlands)
 1934
 gelatin silver photograph
 16.6 x 21.8cm image; 17.2 x 22.4cm sheet
 Purchased 1983

Frank Hinder (Australia, 1906-1992)
Subway, Wynyard
 1948
 tempera on hardboard
 22.9 x 19.0cm
 Purchased 1967

Weaver Hawkins **Morning Underground** 1922
 Grace Cossington Smith **The curve of the bridge** 1928-29



Sydney City Sights and Sites

Charles Conder (Australia;England, b.1868, d.1909)
Departure of the Orient – Circular Quay
 1888
 oil on canvas
 45.1 x 50.1cm stretcher; 67.0 x 72.0 x 7.8cm frame
 Purchased 1888

Harold Cazneaux (New Zealand;Australia, 1878-1953)
Sydney Bridge
 circa 1934
 gelatin silver photograph
 29.7 x 21.5cm image/sheet; 35.9 x 27.4cm card
 Gift of the Cazneaux family 1975



John D. Moore (Australia, b.1888, d.1958)
Sydney Harbour
 1936
 oil on canvas
 91.5 x 122.5cm stretcher; 119.5 x 150.5 x 6.5cm frame
 Purchased 1936

John Olsen (Australia, b.1928)
Five bells
 1963
 oil on hardboard
 264.5 x 274.0cm board
 Purchased with funds provided by the Art Gallery Society of New South Wales 1999

John D. Moore **Sydney Harbour** 1936

Brett Whiteley **The balcony 2** 1975

David Moore (Australia, b.1927, d.2003)
Migrants arriving in Sydney
 1966 (printed later)
 gelatin silver photograph
 30.2 x 43.5cm image; 35.7 x 47.0cm sheet
 Gift of the artist 1997

Christo (Bulgaria;United States of America, b.1935)
 Jeanne-Claude (United States of America, b.1935)
Wrapped Coast, Little Bay, Australia
 1969
 gelatin silver photograph
 62.3 x 77.5 x 3.4cm frame
 Gift of Chandler Coventry 1972

Brett Whiteley (Australia, 1939-1992)
The balcony 2
 1975
 oil on canvas
 203.5 x 364.5cm stretcher; 210.9 x 372.2 x 6.3cm frame
 Purchased 1981



War! What is it good for?

Alphonse de Neuville (France, 1835-1885)

The defence of Rorke's Drift 1879

1880

oil on canvas

180.9 x 301.4cm stretcher; 255.7 x 377.5 x 30.0cm frame

Purchased 1882

Käthe Kollwitz (Germany, 1867-1945)

The prisoners

1908

etching and prepared ground

32.5 x 42.5cm platemark; 44.9 x 62.3cm sheet

Purchased 1956



Arthur Streeton (Australia, 1867-1943)

Boulogne

1918

oil on canvas

91.8 x 153.0cm

Gift of the artist 1926

Grace Cossington Smith (Australia, 1892-1984)

The sock knitter

1915

oil on canvas

61.6 x 50.7cm stretcher; 73.7 x 63.0 x 4.4cm frame

Purchased 1960

Laurence Le Guay (Australia, 1917-1990)

Untitled (montage for war poster)

1939

gelatin silver photograph, montage

40.5 x 31.9cm image/sheet

Gift of the artist 1979

Käthe Kollwitz **The prisoners** 1908

MORIMURA Yasumasa **Slaughter Cabinet II** 1991

MORIMURA Yasumasa (Japan, b.1951)

Slaughter Cabinet II

1991

wood, lightbox, gelatin silver photograph

58.0 x 43.0 x 43.0cm

Purchased with funds provided by the Young Friends of the Art Gallery Society of New South Wales 1996



Publish or perish

ZHU Nan (China, b.18th century)

Calligraphy

18th century

four hanging scrolls; ink on paper

30.5 x 128.0cm [each scroll]

Edward and Goldie Sternberg Chinese Art Purchase Fund 1992

'Suzuribako' (writing case)

Japan

18th century-19th century

Lacquerware

18.3 x 16.8 x 3.0cm

Purchased 2004

Kurt Schwitters (Germany 1887-1948)

Theo van Doesburg (Netherlands 1883-1931)

Kleine DADA Soirée

1923

colour lithograph

29.8 x 29.8cm image/sheet

Purchased 1984



El Lissitzky (Russia, 1890-1941)

Untitled (Pressa catalogue)

1928

photocollage, ink and paint on photographic paper

14.9 x 10.9cm image/sheet

Purchased 1997

Simryn Gill (Singapore;Malaysia;Australia, b.1959)

Forest

1996-1998

16 gelatin silver photographs

120.0 x 95.0cm each image

Purchased with funds provided by the Art Gallery Society of New South Wales Contempo Group 2003

Janet Burchill (Australia, b.1955)

Chain of ponds 'following the blind leading the blind'

1997

synthetic polymer paint on canvas and

synthetic polymer paint on wood

Purchased with funds provided by the Contemporary Collection Benefactors' Program 1999

ZHU Nan *Calligraphy* 18th century

Kurt Schwitters, Theo van Doesburg *Kleine DADA Soirée* 1923

Glossary

Key words and their definitions used within this kit that relate to Preston's art practice, body of work and the exhibition *Margaret Preston: art and life*.

Anthropologist A person who studies the science of origin and cultural development, customs and beliefs of mankind

Composition The act of combining elements or the plan, placement or arrangement of the elements in a work of art.

Contemporary Of the present time. Belonging, existing or occurring at the same time

Contrast To compare by observing differences; opposition or juxtaposition of different forms, lines or colours in a work of art to intensify each other's properties and produce a more dynamic expression

Decorative To adorn or embellish

Domestic Pertaining to the home, the household or household affairs

Ethnographic The scientific description and classification of the various cultural and racial groups in mankind

Feminine Pertaining to or to be associated with a woman

Gouache A heavy opaque watercolour paint producing a less wet appearance and a more strongly coloured picture than ordinary watercolour.

Hybrid Composed of elements of different or incongruous kind

Icons A representation in art of some sacred personage, itself venerated as sacred

Indigenous Originating in and characterising a particular region or country

Metaphor A figure of speech in which a term is applied to something to which it is not literally applicable, in order to suggest a resemblance

Modern Of the present or recent time; not ancient or remote

Modernism An art movement characterised by the deliberate departure from tradition and the use of innovative forms of expression that distinguish many styles in the arts and literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Monochrome The use of one colour or tones of that colour

Monotype A one of a kind print made by painting on a smooth surface and then printing directly onto paper.

Nationalism Devotion to the interests of one's own nation

Ritual An established or a prescribed procedure or code for a religious or other rite

Scepticism To mistrust and maintain a doubting pessimistic attitude towards people, plans or ideas

Self portrait A portrait an artist makes using himself or herself as its subject

Specimen A part or an individual taken as exemplifying a whole mass or a number

Spontaneity To be unconstrained

Still life A picture of objects. Common still life subjects include vessels, food and flowers

Symbolic To have qualities regarded as standing for or representing something else. A form, image or subject representing a meaning other than the one with which it is usually associated

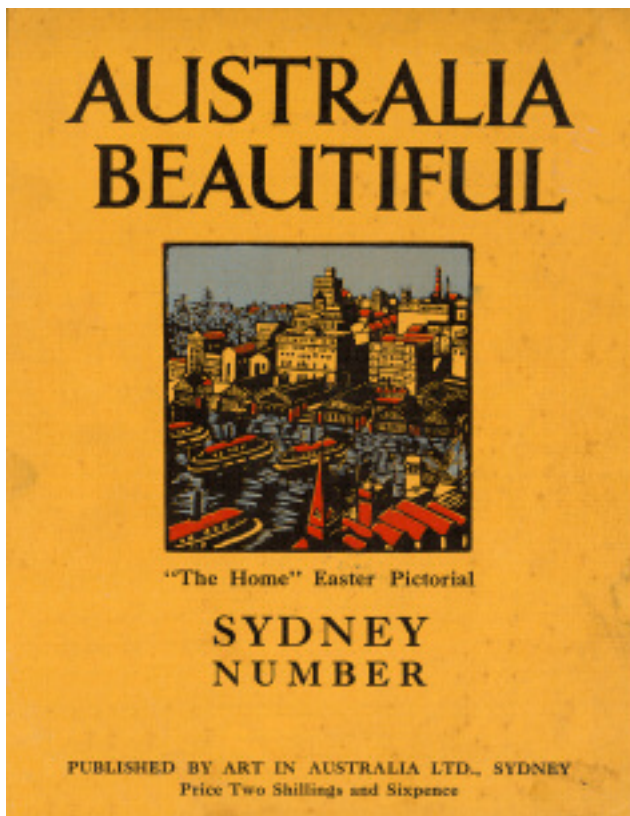
Taste The sense of what is fitting, harmonious, or beautiful. A personal preference or liking. The capacity to tell what is aesthetically excellent or appropriate.

Technology The branch of knowledge that is applied to industry, science and engineering

Vanitas A still life painting which reminds us of life's fleeting qualities is called a vanitas. Latin for vanity, this term refers to a type of still life consisting of a collection of objects that symbolise the brevity of human life and the transience of earthly pleasures and achievements

Margaret Preston in her garden Berowra 1937
Photograph by FJ Halmarick, Fairfaxphotos





Top: *Australia Beautiful* 1928

Above: *Australina Dream* – a poem by Ian Mudie cover

Selected references

Catalogues

- Elizabeth Butel, *Margaret Preston: the art of constant rearrangement*, Sydney: Viking in association with the Art Gallery of New South Wales
- Elizabeth Butel (ed) *Art and Australia by Margaret Preston: selected writings 1920-1950*, Imprint, Sydney, 2003
- Deborah Edwards, Rose Peel, *Margaret Preston: art and life* Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney 2005
- Jane Hylton, *Modern Australian Women: paintings and prints 1925-1945* Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide 2000
- Ian North, *The Art of Margaret Preston*, Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide, 1980
- Sydney Ure Smith and Leon Gellert (ed.) *Margaret Preston: Recent paintings*, Art in Australia, Sydney 1929

Selected writings by Margaret Preston (in publishing order)

- 'Why I became a convert to Modern Art', *The Home* Vol 4, No. 2, June 1923
- With Thea Proctor, 'The Gentle art of arranging flowers', *The Home* Vol. , No. 2 June 1924
- 'Colour', *Art in Australia* 3rd Series, No. 9 October 1924
- 'Art for crafts – Aboriginal Art Artfully Applied', *The Home*, Vol. 5, No. 5 December 1924
- 'The Indigenous Art of Australia', *Art in Australia* 3rd Series, No. 11, March 1925
- 'The best conditions for furnishing the bedroom', *The Home*, Vol. 7, No. 7, July 1926
- 'There and back in Three Months', *The Home*, Vol. 7, No. 10, October 1926
- 'What is to be our National Art?' *Undergrowth* March – April 1927
- 'From Eggs to Electrolux', *Art and Australia – Margaret Preston Number, 3rd series*, No. 22, December 1927
- 'Australian Artists versus art', *Art in Australia* 3rd series, No. 26 December 1928
- '92 Aphorism by Margaret Preston and others', in *Margaret Preston: Recent paintings*, edited by Sydney Ure Smith and Leon Gellert, Sydney: Ure smith 1929
- 'The Application of Aboriginal Designs', *Art in Australia* 3rd Series, No. 31, March 1930
- 'Away with Poker-worked Kookaburras' and Gumleaves, *Sunday Pictorial*, April 6th 1930
- 'Meccano as an ideal', *Manuscripts* No. 2 1932
- 'Crafts that Aid' *Art in Australia* 3rd Series No. 77 November 1939
- 'Paintings in Arnhem Land', *Art in Australia* 3rd Series, No 81, November 1940
- 'Aboriginal Art', *Art in Australia* 4th Series, No. 2 June – August 1941
- 'My Monotypes', in *Margaret Preston's Monotypes*, Ure Smith 1949

Online

Margaret Preston: art and life, Art Gallery of New South Wales
www.margaretpreston.com.au

Art Gallery of New South Wales Collection online
www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/collection

Art Gallery of New South Wales My Virtual Gallery
www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/mvp

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www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/education

Preston: for the record

This indeed is a brain with unlimited invention, which has never once repeated itself

... we have a distinguished and original artist in Australia – an artist with abundant vitality ... the intellectual gift of invention and an emotional colour sense which amounts to genius

Thea Proctor, 1927

She is as full of colour combinations as a kaleidoscope

J. S. MacDonald 1925

All vital artists have enemies. Where they fail to inspire delight they instil terror. Margaret Preston is the natural enemy of the dull.

Sydney Ure Smith 1927

I offered Syd Smith a full exhibition [of my work] ... but on condition that some restraint was exercised over the exhibition of crude colour, particularly the chintz pattern stuff of Mrs Preston.

Norman Lindsay 1924

She is the most envious thing I know; a raging creature who burns her work when it doesn't sell. Hasn't one ounce of gratitude in her carcass. Still a fine artist ...

Lionel Lindsay 1938

Its as well the male part of the Society of Artists selection committee were non-aggressive because we've had to put up with Mrs Preston and Thea Proctor . . . They are 'personal' at all times and most dogmatic. They cannot be impersonal as most men can.

Sydney Ure Smith 1938

She belongs to no school. She works according to her own vision ... The Australian landscape comes to life in her monotypes with a new kind of realism

G.H.W. 1949

In her heyday she was a powerhouse of rebellion

Leon Gellert, 1967

She was the most naturally conceited person I ever knew

Lloyd Rees 1977

To the extent Margaret Preston was Modernism in Australia between the wars, this was because she was the one artist who persistently attempted to engage, in various media, the complex of problems which gave rise to Modernism.

Humphrey McQueen 1979

She was a voluble and tough-minded woman, a prolific painter-printmaker, an immensely readable and provocative critic, a champion of Aboriginal art and Australian culture, and an adventuresome traveller ... I imagine Margaret Preston even now, as terrifying, with her wit and her formidable personality

Janine Burke 1980

Her advocacy of Aboriginal art ... assumed that she was able to transcend cultural differences and that her values were not complicitly involved in the destruction of Aboriginal culture ...

Ann Stephen 1980

If one considers her work both in terms of its inherent aesthetic achievement and its contribution to an independent Australian tradition, I doubt whether there was anyone at that time to equal her.

Bernard Smith, 1979

Preston's public success ... came at a cost. It had to be achieved as the main representative of an innocuous 'design' done by and for women, which was the only acceptable version of modernism in the mainstream.

Caroline Jordon 1993

Though in an Aboriginal style there are no actual people or feeling for the meaning of the designs ... [in Preston's art]. It is a veneer by someone who is still like a tourist in their own country.

Djon Mundine 2005

The attempts by Preston and her handful of associates to popularise Aboriginal imagery and techniques at a time when Aboriginal art itself had received little public attention, may have contributed to the economic viability over the next twenty or thirty years of Indigenous bark painting enterprises in Arnhem Land.

Vivien Johnson 2000

To Aboriginal eyes it reads as a scrambled orthography of vaguely familiar words, or a discordant symphony where the notes don't ring quite true. Preston's passionate attempts, while well intentioned, were doomed to fail ultimately because they are meaningless to Aboriginal people – not unlike the contemporaneous government policy of assimilation'

Hetti Perkins 2005

Margaret Preston did produce a hybrid, a dynamic one to be sure, because modernism set the terms of internationalism as a kind of abstract universality in which the distinctiveness of national cultures only reappeared when they declared their differences through pre-modern, preferably 'primitive' forms ... The artificial hybrid was a necessity of this process.

Terry Smith 2002

I am interested in exploring the cross cultural issues ... particularly the issues surrounding Preston's advocacy of appropriating 'Aboriginal art' as a means to develop an 'indigenous' style of Australian modern art while at the same time, being dismissive of aboriginal cultures and peoples. This is an obvious issue, which is extremely relevant to our times and our national identity.'

Gordon Bennett 2000



Margaret Preston with palette 1924

Photograph by Harold Cazneaux Preston archive, Art Gallery of New South Wales

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