



THEIR MOTHERS' DAUGHTERS

Artist Jeweller Dorothy Erickson



In our last issue we wrote about wellknown West Australian naturalist and botanical artist Rica Erickson who died in 2009 aged 101. In this issue we continue that story with Rica's daughter DOROTHY ERICKSON an internationally recognised artist jeweller who has exhibited in prestigious exhibitions in Europe and Asia since the 1970s. Her work is represented in state collections in Australia, the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, the Schmuckmuseum in Pforzheim, Germany, the National Fine Art Museum in Malta and private collections around the world.

Above: Dampiera Lindleyi, 2014, necklace, steel cable, titanium, gold-plated silver, lapis lazuli
Left: Artsite Gallery, Camperdown, 2014, Dorothy Erickson's exhibition

Like her mother Rica, Dorothy is driven to achieve—she acknowledges that she has had to be persistent and pioneering in order to gain recognition and renown. Clearly her mother's daughter, Dorothy was immersed from a very early age in the unique flora that is Western Australia's heritage. She too exhibited wildflower paintings as a child and had other paintings selected to tour internationally while still in primary school. She studied botany as part of a teaching degree and in the 1960s enrolled at the Chelsea Institute in London while she was also researching Australian plants at Kew Gardens and the Natural History Museum in South Kensington for her mother.

On her return to Western Australia Dorothy taught during the day and undertook degrees in both art and design at night. She graduated as an artist jeweller in 1972 after a course was created at the newly opened Western Australian Institute of Technology. Dorothy resigned from the Education Department in 1976 in order to concentrate on postgraduate work in jewellery and silversmithing although she continued to lecture at the Western Australian Institute of Technology until 1981.

Living life at such a frenetic pace took its toll. Exhibiting and lecturing around Australia and



Top: Banksia grandis and Dryandra formosa 2008, necklaces, sterling silver, 18ct gold, lemon quartz, citrine
Right: Banksia grandis, 2008, two finger ring, 18ct gold, lemon quartz



internationally, serving as the President of the Craft Council of Western Australia, were combined with a busy personal life as the wife of the Town Planning Commissioner. Her marriage would end in divorce and repetitive strain injury and a debilitating neurological illness meant that Dorothy could no longer make jewellery. Instead she turned to research and writing, undertaking a PhD in Art History at the University of Western Australia and the Royal College of Art in London. She acknowledges she was in the right place at the right time—ageist legislation had just been introduced and she won a university scholarship to fund her degree.

In the late 1980s an invitation to feature in a television series about Australian craftspeople saw her return to the craftsman's bench and with help she resumed making and exhibiting. Dorothy revised her thesis and turned it into the book *Gold and Silversmithing in Western Australia: A History* which was published in 2010 and is about to go into a second edition. Her desire to promote local craftspeople and fill the gap in public knowledge of Western Australian art and design has led to numerous articles culminating in this year's publication of a major reference book: *Inspired by Light and Land: Designers and Makers in Western Australia 1829-1969*. This is a considerable achievement, the fruition of a project of more than 30 years, a beautiful publication of almost 500 pages which traces the arts from the first years of colonial life to recent times. The arts in Western Australia evolved from a very different base from that of the east coast. Here was a British colony of gentlefolk, the newcomers entranced by the light, landforms and the unusual flora and fauna. It is interesting to read that Western Australia had little wish for close ties with the east coast and well into the twentieth century its focus was on the wider world and its art as part of international movements of the time. An explosive energy and inspiration developed in the wake of the 1960s iron-ore boom leading to the rise of the artist-craftsperson, the influence of immigration, the revitalisation of the technical colleges and the growth of various craft groups and the beginnings of the Craft Council movement. The story from this time to the present day will be taken up by Dorothy in the planned second volume.

Dorothy's jewellery usually draws from the flora, fauna, colours and light of Western Australia and at the time of her mother's death it was beginning to be inspired by Western Australian wildflowers. She had

just completed the commissioned book *A Joy Forever: The Story of Kings Park*. The work in progress soon metamorphosed into a collection in her mother's honour with most pieces based on Rica's paintings or photographs. The first pieces were exhibited in Brisbane in 2012 and then a joint exhibition of Rica's paintings and Dorothy's jewellery *Her Mother's Daughter* was held at the Bunbury Regional Art Galleries in 2013.

Dorothy says of the work: 'Few of the jewellery pieces are literal translations. They are instead evocations of the colour, form or habit of individual species of our precious and endangered heritage. Many of the works are kinetic, moving with the body, a theme I have been pursuing for some time.'

In November 2014 Dorothy exhibited in Sydney at Artsite Gallery in Camperdown. *Dorothy Erickson: Twenty-first Century Work* consisted of seventy works from the two themes she had been working on during that time— *A Homage to Klimt* and the *Wildflower Collection*.

The Klimt collection evolved following years of going regularly to work in Vienna with jeweller Erika Leitner. Dorothy's first visit was in 1980 for the World Craft Council Conference when she was invited to hold a solo exhibition in the legendary Galerie am Graben. Since that time she has returned regularly to exhibit and work, to meet with other Austrian jewellers and enjoy life in this sophisticated European city.

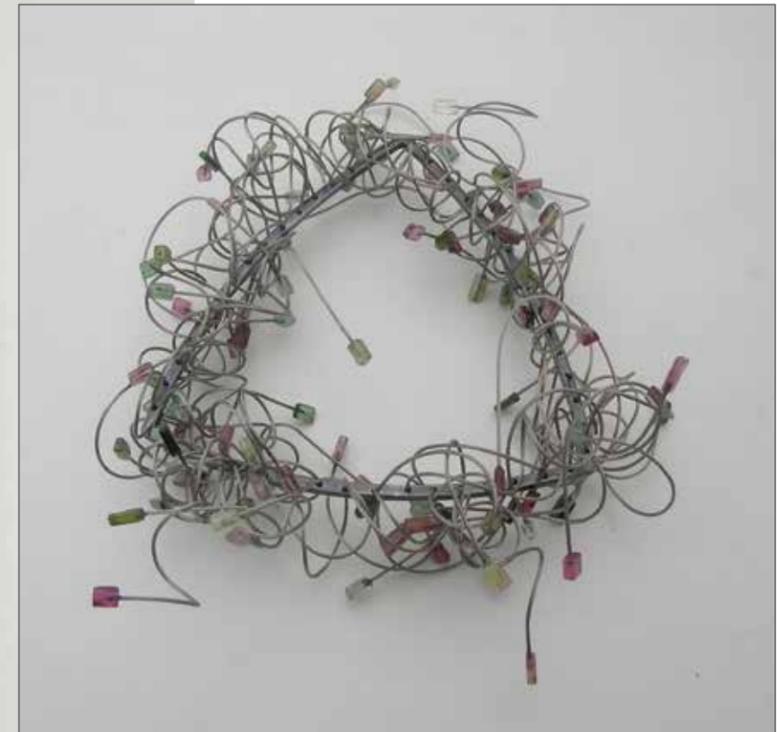


Dryandra formosa, 2013, brooch, 18ct gold, sapphires
Right: Abstract Kirche in Cassone, 2004, brooch, 18ct gold, sapphires

Inevitably Klimt's artworks infiltrated her psyche and in the first years of the twenty-first century she temporarily abandoned her Australian inspiration for an Austrian muse. The works were facilitated by the sudden availability of multicoloured sapphires which appeared out of Africa at the end of the 1990s. These were evocative of the tesserae of mosaics and suggested the possibility of miniature paintings. She had trained originally as a painter and the colours and combinations possible in these gemstones stimulated Dorothy to use her painter's eye to translate the paintings of Gustav Klimt into sparkling wearable objects. The abstract 'Kirche in Cassone' brooch is such an example. This has led to other pieces for exhibitions such as those at Lesley Craze Gallery in London for which the bracelet 'Lightning over Perth' was created and 'Rica Erickson' for the touring exhibition *Tinker Tailor*. This latter brooch recreates the cover of her mother's book *A Naturalist's Life*.

Wildflower inspired pieces on display in Sydney included those inspired by the acid yellow flowers and deeply serrated leaves of the *Banksia grandis* and the more delicate related species of *Dryandra*. Her 'Wildflower Carpet' necklace had a series of small tear shaped pastel coloured sapphires evocative of the carpets of everlasting which are seen on the sand-plain country near the family farm. Another necklace was based on her mother's painting of the 'Yanchep Rose' and others on Dampier and Calytrix. Other pieces from the Wildflower Collection were being exhibited at the same time in London, and in an exhibition touring Australia, while a bracelet and necklace based on Hakeas and Grevilleas were exhibited in Milan in December 2014.

In 2014, the forty-fifth year of her jewellery career, Dorothy commenced a new collection based on research into her antecedents and their occupations in Australia, Scotland, Wales, England and Sweden. As she traces the connections between the generations, work for the Connections Collection is beginning to evolve. The first of these experimental pieces was seen in the Sydney exhibition. In a delicate shimmering silver vest she made a connection with her much loved great grandmother Rica Cooke who had crocheted beautiful clothes for her dolls. Another research piece explored the world of Paisley shawls in metal inspired by the ancestor who worked on a shawl which won a medal at the



Left:
Calytrix, 2014, necklace, steel cable, steel mesh rope, amethyst, gold-plated silver, silver, 18ct gold

Above:
Hakea clavata, 2011, bracelet, sterling silver, steel cable, tourmaline exhibited in Milan, Italy in December 2014
Below: Wildflower carpet, 2014, necklace, 18ct gold, sapphires, steel mesh rope

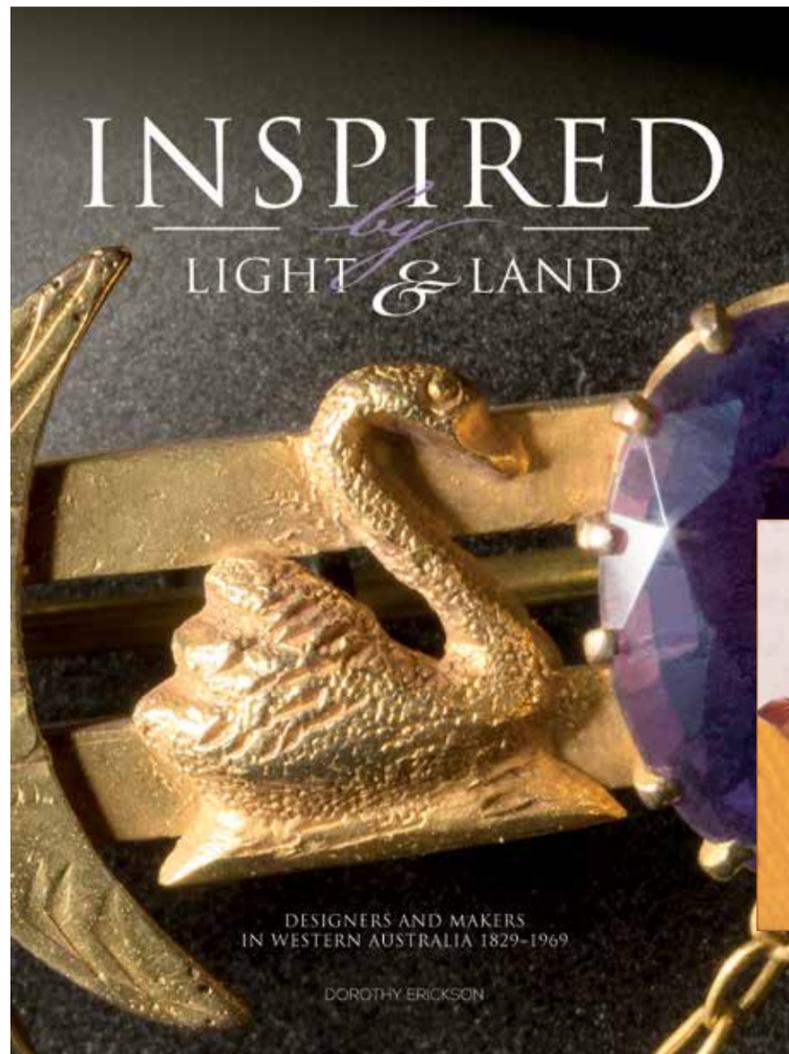




1851 Great Exhibition in London before coming to Victoria to work as a metalsmith. In Dorothy's piece the leaf of a Synaphea, a Western Australian wildflower, is substituted for the 'tree-of-life' usually seen in the Paisley pattern.

Dorothy Erickson has exhibited in over 350 group exhibitions, held thirty-six solo shows and has been the initiator and curator of a number of internationally touring exhibitions. She formed a jewellers' group in Western Australia in 1979 (now part of the Jewellers and Metalsmiths Group Australia) to support emerging jewellers and has a long list of printed articles and books to her credit as she continues to promote local craftspeople and fill the gap in public knowledge of Western Australian art and design.

Carolynne Skinner with Dorothy Erickson



Above:
Lightning over Perth, 2004,
bracelet 18ct gold, sapphires

Opposite:
Dampiera, 2014, pendant, gold-
plated sterling silver, lapis lazuli,
steel cable. (Photograph Acorn
Studios)

