



A R T S

EDITORIAL

ARTISTS' BOOKS in their extraordinary diversity provide our theme for this issue. There are a number of artists' books prizes in Australia today, reflecting a growing desire in the public arena and in private to create and build collections of these always interesting and sometimes controversial works of art. Artists' books are accessible—in cost and in size; they are clever or humorous and often very beautiful. They can be moving and insightful and they can be fun. They can be almost anything.

While researching this subject I noticed how many of the artists whose 'books' have been entered into the main prizes in this country have also had their work acquired by the major collections—state libraries and municipal collections. Clearly, entering competitions and coming to the attention of the well respected judges is a good way to catch the attention of collectors and buyers. Also striking is how few guidelines there are for entry into any of the competitions. **Bernard Appassamy's** elegant *Book of Asylum* made up of locker tickets for Villawood Immigration Detention Centre has been acquired by **Manly Library's Artists' Books Collection** alongside other book-shaped works. At its last prize **Artspace Mackay** acquired *The Waves*, a sculptural work by artist **Michele Skelton** whose work is mainly in textiles.

The **Fremantle Print Awards** for forty years have acquired for their famous collection largely but not exclusively various forms of printmaking, ranging from the traditional to the controversial. And the contemporary designer bookbinders? In some ways we seem still to be having that age-old debate, art versus craft, and so to a large extent in Australia at least they remain exclusive. It may be time to narrow down entry rules and make a clearer distinction between the different awards so that each acquires its own identity. There is plenty of scope for specialisation given the open-ended definition of artists' books and there is certainly plenty of scope for more regional galleries and municipal libraries to look at starting their own awards and collections.

In OZ ARTS magazine's earlier incarnation in the 1990s, artist printmaker **Enid Ratnam-Keese** featured in issue 9 with her unusual artists' books. Readers were enthralled with her creations: *Letters to Certain Women* was a collection of undelivered letters to certain women living in the Blue Mountains and consisted of hand-coloured paper drypoints on handmade paper, rolled and sealed and contained in a cedar box with one side open. We are still wondering who were these certain women and what was written inside. In our article in this issue, *Mapping the Edges of the Night*, we look at Enid's poignant and beautiful collection of recent notebooks.

Private collectors are extremely important to the arts. **Akky Van Ogtrop**, President of the Print Council of Australia, is an enthusiastic and prolific collector of artists' books whose interest was aroused by her father, a collector of music, scores and other memorabilia and in whose collection she came across an early edition of the famous *Der Sturm* magazine. This would greatly influence her own collecting and future academic studies. Readers will enjoy imagining Akky in book lolly shops and perhaps even swallowing the most delicious of her acquisitions!

Historically artists' books utilised printmaking and photography in pursuit of radical ends. Photographers' artists' books today lean towards social and environmental subjects, which are also often political and radical, one might argue. The second part of this issue of our magazine is devoted to something quite different again, a collaboration of photographer **Peter Adams** and poet (and artist) **Ted Markstein**, which describes some of the photographers worldwide whose portraits Adams has shot in conjunction with the image of their claim-to-fame photograph. This Adams and Markstein collaboration might justifiably be called an artists' book in itself – an appetiser before the publication of Peter Adams' book *A Few of the Legends*, which will be available later in the year.

It is appropriate that we have also included a story about *The Thinking Season* at **Varuna**, The Writers' House, as it heads into its eleventh season of the Sydney Writers' Festival regional program. We hope readers will enjoy this wonderfully creative 'bookish' issue.

Carolynne Skinner