

The recent retrospective at Goulburn Regional Art Gallery was a celebration of the contribution of The Windmill Trust Scholarship to the vitality and freshness of contemporary art practice in regional NSW

Keeping faith with their muse

A decade of the Windmill

by OWEN LEONG

Established by Prim Moss in memory of her sister, artist Penny Meagher, ten years ago, the Windmill Trust Scholarship is an annual award to support regional artists who face particular difficulties in continuing their professional practice.

As many artists living in regional NSW know only too well, sometimes determination, self-discipline and hard work are simply not enough.

Sometime in 1995, in a radio broadcast on the ABC Country Hour, a woman was telling her story of hardship as an artist and farmer's wife. She was unable to paint because her husband had to take a job in town, sell most of their stock, and leave her to run the property and educate the children. Prim Moss was listening. "This was a person who had been an artist all her life," says Prim, "It was not just a hobby, but her life's work. Her passion." The idea for the Windmill Trust Scholarship was born.

Thinking back on all the pleasure her sister had enjoyed from her life's passion, her art, Prim formed a plan. Together with Penny's husband, Rod Meagher and solicitor and arts-lover, Paul Duffy, and in consultation with the Director of Macquarie Galleries, Mary Turner, and (then) manager of Regional Galleries NSW, Jane Raffin, the inaugural Windmill Trust Scholarship was launched in 1997.

Borne of a consciousness of how isolation from other artists and lack of access to art supplies can make it difficult to maintain an art practice, the aim of the scholarship was to help country artists carry on with their art in difficult times. It's working. The inaugural Windmill Trust Scholarship went to Esad Mufic, a refugee from Sarajevo, who possessed both outstanding talent and need. Since its inception in 1997, the scholarship has assisted fourteen artists realise their creative vision and achieve their artistic goals.




Christine McMillan, Symmetrical Planting, 2006, detail of installation: remnant gauze and cable ties encasing poplar trees.

To mark the tenth year of support for regional artists through the Windmill Trust in 2007, Goulburn Regional Art Gallery initiated a major exhibition: *A Decade of the Windmill*. As well as highlighting the value of the Windmill Trust Scholarship to regional artists, the

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exhibition was a celebration of regional art practice. Showcasing new work by previous winners, the exhibition was opened on 14 April with a special event, 'Conversing the Windmill', which included an introduction to the Windmill Trust Scholarship by Prim Moss, a guided exhibition walk-through with artists and a panel session about the scholarship and regional arts practice.

Jennifer Lamb, Director of the Goulburn Regional Art Gallery, has worked in the regional arts sector for nearly twenty four years and is constantly aware of the challenges faced by regional artists in establishing and pursuing a successful art career. "Regional artists, especially in more remote regions, face the challenge of working in isolation ... whether from their regional centre with its galleries and art training facilities or from other artists. Conversely, this isolation invariably provides the metaphorical space to work unfettered by current trends to develop an individual expression. And it is that individual expression, often derived from and about the landscape in which the artist lives, that gives regional contemporary art practice its vitality and freshness," says Jennifer. "That vitality and freshness often represents the land of the regions. It is not unreasonable to suggest that artists living in regional areas have a closer affinity to the land than their city cousins. Regional expressions of the landscape are as rich and diverse as the artists living and working within it. If there is a tradition of landscape art in Australia, its contemporary expression is embedded in regional art practice."

References to the landscape, environmental concerns, human marks and traces all abound in the works of winners of the Windmill Trust Scholarship. Jonathan Throsby won the scholarship in 2005 with his complex paintings of the land. "Having lived and worked in some of the remotest areas of Northern and Western Australia," says Jonathan, "I am aware of a desert, one that has been created since white settlement, called agriculture. At this desert's heart lies a lack of custodial responsibility to the land. I paint and draw Australian landscape based upon my own physical and intimate experience of being in and on the land. I do not paint views; my work is closely aligned to mapping of the land to the body, tracing contours, layers of human habitation."

Christine McMillan's exquisite gauze and netting sculptures also reference the landscape. The artist transforms observations of the land around her into subtle and evocative sculptures, at times woven directly into the landscape itself. Drawing upon the forms of poplar trees, carp scales and echidna spines, her work won the Windmill Trust Scholarship in 2001. "The Windmill Trust acknowledged my work as an artist," says Christine. She has since gone on to achieve great success in her art practice.

Receiving the scholarship in 2003, Soozie Coumbe was able to work on a sculptural project in a rural village in Japan. There, she was part of a team of assistants who worked with the local community of Nanatsugama to realise a community sculpture by Australian artist Anne Graham for inclusion in the Echico Tsumari Art Triennial. "As a practicing rural artist this opportunity to see and be involved in an international sculpture event was invaluable," says Soozie.



Soozie Coumbe. *Fragile Nature*, 2007 (detail) : timber, cotton thread, acrylic

Since 1999, the Windmill Trust Scholarship has been proudly administered by the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA). Tamara Winikoff, Executive Director of NAVA, attended the launch of *A Decade of the Windmill* to join in celebrating this special occasion and to praise the success of the winners. "It is hard to credit that ten years have passed since I first sat around a table with Prim Moss and Paul Duffy in the NAVA office on the edge of Sydney's CBD to talk about the scholarship," says Tamara. Prim's idea was to use the funds donated by friends and family to help regionally based artists to overcome the challenges of being away from the resources and support structures of the city, and keep faith with their muse."

It was a great vision. A decade on, and the Windmill Trust has made a significant contribution to regional arts practice through its direct support of regional NSW artists. With the consistently high standard of applications (and work) being produced, the trustees have high expectations for the growing future of the arts in the regions, and the continuing role of the Windmill Trust Scholarship in that.

"People often ask, 'Why the *Windmill* Scholarship?'," says Prim. "When meeting with Mary Turner and Jane Raffin at the beginning, I remembered how my sister, when she was in hospital, used to ask if their new windmill on their land was turning. The windmill is an Australian country icon but as Mary said, it also means dynamism and creation of energy, which is what the artists selected by the judges have certainly shown." ■

The next round of applications for the Windmill Trust Scholarship opens in May 2008. Contact National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) Tel 02 9368 1900 Website www.visualarts.net.au

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September

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6 – 9 September

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