

Water and Art Conversations



WITH RESIDENTS OF CAROONA AGED CARE

ABOUT THE PROJECT

This pilot project was the result of a partnership between three organisations in the Northern Rivers, NSW: Rous Water, the Lismore Regional Art Gallery and Uniting Care's residential aged care service, Caroonia.

For a long time I had had the idea of taking beautiful pieces of art from the storage area of an art gallery to hang on the walls in an aged care setting. I was fortunate to be able to explore the idea further as part of research for a Doctorate of Creative Arts at University of Technology Sydney titled 'New Dimensions in Water Conversation'.

The idea was to extend the scope of residents' cultural life, and to extend the reach of the regional gallery's audience. At the same time it was a way for Rous Water's valuable work to penetrate into the community beyond the scope of their existing partnerships. I did a pop-up gallery at Caroonia on the subject of water for a week, through support of a fellowship from the Australia Council for the Arts Community Cultural Development Fund.

I did a pop-up gallery at Caroonia for a week, thanks to Lismore Regional Art Gallery. It was on the subject of water. The gallery generously lent five artworks through a letter of agreement with agreed loan dates and a schedule of the works, and provided staff to install the work. An Australia Council for the Arts Community Cultural Development Fund fellowship gave me the time for the project.

Thanks to each of the organisations and their staff, and especially to the participants in the project. The stories in this booklet show how much they enjoyed the art and the stories from their different lives.



FIVE ARTWORKS ON LOAN FROM LISMORE REGIONAL ART GALLERY

Cox's River Sketch, Dorothea Toovey, 1959

Richmond River High School Swimming Carnival, Darcy McFadden, 1969

Lagoon Reflections, Mary Williams, 1980

Goonengerry Paradise, Jules Harper, 1993

Cane Punt on the Richmond River 1930s, Maxwell Price, 1988

I'm coming in next week to talk to you in small groups. I'm interested in your thoughts about the paintings and photos the Lismore Regional Art Gallery has loaned to Caroon. I hope that you'll enjoy being part of the activity, and that we'll hear plenty of stories about your experience with water.

I'll be there with my pen and notebook to write down your stories for others to enjoy. What we'd like to do after that is to display the paintings and your stories on display in town. This will give your friends and relatives a chance to see what you had to say.

What you add in can be short or as long as you like. If I write your story down, there will be the opportunity for you to add to it or change it before we put the stories up on display. Or you might prefer to write a story yourself.

I've been talking to many people on the north coast about water over the past year. Firefighters, plumbers, dog washers, workers at Rous Water, and people like you who have known water in many different ways in their lifetimes.

So water's the theme for our time together. I look forward to hearing your stories.

Annie Bolitho





Impre

I'm pleased there's no nudes!
I like that end one – the barge on the Richmond River
Good old cane cutting!
The waterlilies are nice – very peaceful, calming
That's a beautiful one – I like the bush. I come from
England and the trees of the bush
are more interesting to me than the sea
That one's of an outdoor bath – I wonder if they do
have a bath in the house? – in the old days when you
lived in the country, the houses didn't have bathrooms
I like the big one – it puts me in mind of when I used to
go fishing

GROUP

●
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The big boats from Sydney used to come up the Richmond to Lismore
My brother worked for years on the wharf
Loading them up and unloading
It was the only transport bringing things into town then.
Gee they were big boats used to come up there.

GRACE BUTCHER

When I was nine or ten we were on the land
The Goulburn side of Crookwell – the best spud country in Australia
In a dry season I had to drag water from a 40 foot well
It was a stark operation
You had the rope, you had the bucket and you had two hands
There were planks across the well and you'd have one foot on one side
and one on the other and you'd hope you didn't fall in!
But the water wasn't nice –
That kind of soil, the deeper you went, it became nearly offensive, the
smell of the water
We boiled it.
After a while we discovered a spring coming out of the side of a hill
a long way from the house – beautiful water
But again we had to do it primitively – I'd carry water in a big billy for
my father to drink when he was working.
Didn't you have a furphy?
No not at that stage.
We had a furphy – a big cylinder on wheels
It carried maybe 40,50,60 gallons of water
on a wooden frame
You hitched a horse to it.

WYNNE & CHRIS PRIEST

I grew up in West Hallam in Derbyshire
It was a brick bungalow style of house
Our toilet was outside – the coalhouse was to the left
You had to order in coal for heating then – and the toilet to the right
In winter when you went down the step, there'd be snow and ice
and you could slide across to the toilet!
When you went to pull the chain, the water was frozen
and of course it wouldn't pull!
That happened quite a lot when it was cold
You just didn't go till it thawed!

BOBBY MCDONNELL

An outstanding thing in my mind is that
when we moved to Tweed Heads
We had three corrugated iron tanks
Of course the water is plentiful on the
north coast
and it was very nice water.
All of a sudden the councils around said
'You have to get rid of those tanks'
I think that was a real shame
Reticulated water is great for convenience,
but in any kind of crisis we no
longer stored rainwater.

KATH WYNNE

I learned to swim in a muddy dam – a real old station
dam on the
Murrumbidgee irrigation
Splashed around till we learned.
You had to keep on the move or the yabbies would bite
your toes!
Our favourite pastime was catching yabbies
We had a canoe on the dam too.
We had tanks to catch the rainwater –
Had to go out there for every drop of water we used.
We were ten years there and then wen to Barellan –
that's Yvonne Goolagong's country
Drought stricken country it was then – sixteen inches
was the average rainfall.
We bathed every day
The water was from a muddy dam – we cleared it with
alum
That made the water very hard.
You had a dipper of water and you stood in a basin,
washed yourself over
with sponge and soap, then poured the water over
Then you took that out and put it on your favourite
plant in the garden
That was in the days of real sport.

CHRIS PRIEST

I remember one very tragic situation
Two little boys ran up to our back door and said Mister come quickly!
Our mate's gone down.
It was muddy water
A primitive dam for stock – no lining, just earth
The muddy water had asphyxiated the child and when the police came
it was too late to revive him.
The boys and girls used to go out from town mainly in the summer
looking for places to swim
They were constantly in danger, before the pool was built in Crookwell –
It came about more quickly because of the possibility of drownings.

KATH WYNNE

We were on a farm see
At Fairy Hill
We used to have that many watermelons
We'd have one each – a little round fella
up on the roof.
Dad used to take us down to the beach at Evans Head
In our old tourer – a Chrysler Plymouth
There was about eight of us, my parents and the children
We used to hurry up and milk the cows
But we didn't worry much
We had to do it the hard way
But we used to enjoy it.

JOAN MOSS

Marom Creek ran through our place
It starts up at Wollongbar, MacLean's Ridges
It was only down the back of our place
And I used to go down often
Because I used to rear ducks
They loved it – but they'd always come home
We had to lock them in at night or a fox or a snake would get them.
All my married life I lived there.

MARIE PERKINS



It puts me in mind of when I used to go fishing
You have a rod, a line and a corky thing for a float
And a cricket on the end
You turned over a cowpat to find them!
You pitch out
You might wait half an hour and the cork goes
down and you bring her up
And if you're lucky you'd get a perch.

LINDA HAMMOND

I think of the water I came across to come to Australia
I've been here for over fifty years.
I sailed from Tilbury and I come right in to Woolloomooloo
Five weeks and three days it took.
I was innocent and stupid
I came out following a man!
He tried to get away but he couldn't!
It was my husband.
He came back out on a little trawler
He said 'If there's a spare place do you want to take it?'
I said 'Never, never!'
When I went back to see my parents it was on a newer boat
It took just three weeks
Later I went to America through the Panama Canal
They gave us lunch on the deck to see the water going down,
and watch
the water rushing in
It was a slow process – a wonderful experience to see it
The boat was going to New York – I had a sister there.

CATH CONNELL

My uncle lived at Federal
I was a widow then and I'd take my children out
for weekends
First of all we'd go and get crickets
Keep them alive in a bottle
You'd put some grass in it to keep them happy.
That'd be on the arm of the Richmond that
went through Keys' place
Keys Bridge goes over the Binna Burra Road
Keys' swimming hole was beautiful too.

BERYL HOGG

I've been on the Irish Sea, the roughest sea in the world
I was over to the Isle of Man
Only about five hours and I was sick.
I've been on several boats actually – England over to Holland
And I went over to Jersey
I've also been on a U-boat
When that one sank the other week it brought it all back
It was so confined I had claustrophobia
I don't know how men live under the sea.

MARY SWANCUTT

When I worked on the exchange at Murwillumbah
We were brought to work in a boat in the floods
We weren't allowed to go home for three days.
We sat on high stools in the water
Our switchboards were still operating
We kept communications going.

BERYL HOGG

I saw a flood once in my life in England
Nothing like as bad as the floods you get here
I was seven
I put on my granny's fox furs
And my mother's high-heeled shoes
And I went up the street to look
People were taking the furniture out and
sweeping away the water
They took my photo and it was in the paper.

MARY SWANCUTT

I grew up in the Midlands
I remember in the holidays
We used to go down to the Three Fields
Down the lanes
With a bottle of water and a few doorstops of jam
We'd go paddling
And then when we got tired of that
We'd sit down and have our bread and water.
We'd stay down there practically all the day
And we'd come home black as the grave
If it was summer mother would get a hose on us
Because she wasn't going to get the tin bath out
And we didn't have a bathroom.

MARY SWANCUTT

I was in a flood
I had the wife up in the ceiling
Down in Uralba
We had no rain – it came from Alstonville
It broke the dam
Came down on top of us
The wash house went
The sulky went
I stuck bags in the bottom
It was all but coming in the windows
The red mud!
I didn't let the wife come down – she would have
collapsed
It was all down through the river flat
It was all over the road at Duck Creek
It took all the fences down
That was the 16th June 1948.
The how was low
All this green panic grass was jammed underneath
with the black snakes
And I had to clear it all out afterwards!

BEN KEEVERS

These days you get 'walking irrigation'
It moves along all the time
Different to the old irrigation
Where you picked the pipes up and carried them everywhere
Now you put them there and that's it
I was a fool, I shifted all the pipes
Sweat used to run out of you
The pipes got very hot when there was no water running
through them
Take a good hour – you'd be running with the pipes
It'd be getting on to milking then.

BEN KEEVERS



Yes we remember ...

You'd just drink if you came across a river or a stream and you were thirsty

Now they put up warning signs on rivers, not to drink or swim

Seepage comes through

The insecticides are on all the plants

If you're anywhere with children you're very wary

It wasn't thought of in days gone by.

GROUP



PROJECT PARTICIPANTS

Kathleen Wynne, Kate Woolley, Grace Butcher, Chris Priest,
Bobby McDonnell, Catherine Connell, Mary Swancutt,
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SUPPORTERS

