

NOT STILL LIVES

SUZANNE SPUNNER



Nimrod Downstairs
Women and Arts Festival, Sydney
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SSA

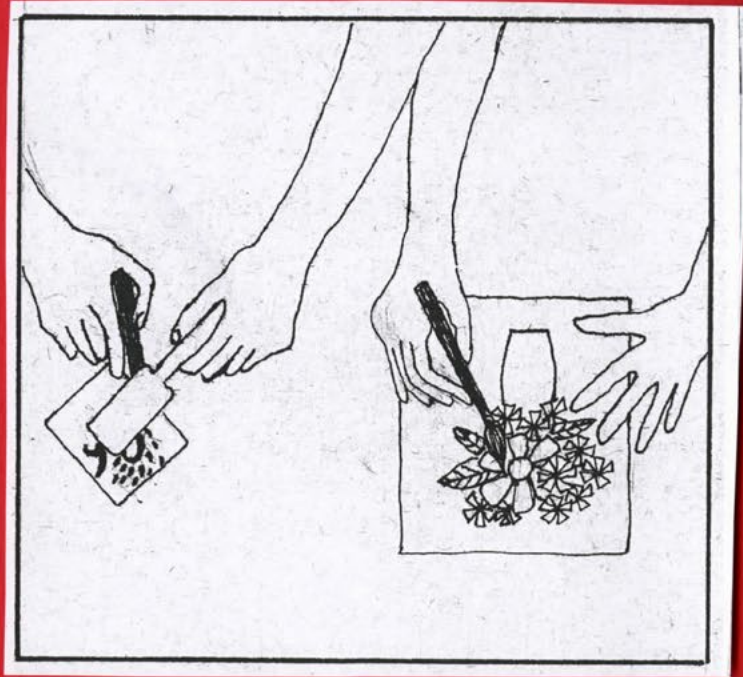
NOT STILL LIVES

Margaret Preston (1875-1963)
and Thea Proctor (1879-1966)

SUZANNE SPUNNER

MARGARET PRESTON

- 1875 Margaret Rose McPherson born Adelaide, SA
- 1893 Studies National Gallery School, Melbourne
- 1895 Father, David Mc Pherson dies of "General paralysis of the Insane"
- 1903 Mother dies; Margaret her sole beneficiary
- 1904 Departs Adelaide with Bessie Davidson for Europe
1907 Returns to Adelaide teaches art at PLC, Adelaide
- 1912 Departs Adelaide with Gladys Reynell for London
1918 Teaches pottery and basketry in Devon to shell-shocked soldiers
- 1919 Returns to Australia via North America;
Marries William Preston in Adelaide
- 1920 Mr & Mrs Preston move to Mosman, Sydney
- 1924 Collaborates with Thea Proctor on an article about Flower Arranging for HOME magazine
- 1925 Joint Exhibition with Thea Proctor at Grosvenor Galleries, Sydney
- 1927 ART in AUSTRALIA publishes Margaret Preston Issue.
1929 Prepares one-woman exhibition; Recent Paintings (and Aphorisms) published; AGNSW commissions a self-portrait.
- 1934 Visitseking, Korea and Japan.
1937 Travels through the Americas and Mexico.
- 1940 Begins to do woodcuts for Jindyworobak productions.
1942 Shares exhibition at AGNSW with William Dobell
1946 Opens first exhibition of Australian Women Artists at AGNSW in conjunction with Jessie Street and Mary Gilmore.
- 1947 Travels by utility to Darwin covering some 10,000 miles.
1949 First exhibition of stencil prints
1958/8 Travels to Ceylon, through Africa and across India
- 1963 Dies in Sydney, aged 88.



NOT STILL LIVES

Margaret Preston - an Australian Artist

Thea Proctor - an Australian Artist

The following people are referred to but do not appear -

George Lambert - a famous Society painter, favorite subjects-
women, horses and men on horses

Amy (Absell) Lambert Maurice - his wife and mother of his sons, Constant and

William (Bill) Preston - husband of Margaret Preston, a company director

Sidney Ure Smith - a passionate weekend painter and publisher of
Australian art, founder and editor of Art in Australia
and Home

Sydney Long - a fine etcher and painter of short stature with a
preference for the sinuous line

Julian Ashton - painter and teacher; Lambert, Long and Proctor
were students at Ashton's school in Sydney and
later Thea Proctor taught Design there

John Peter Russell - Expatriate Australian Impressionist,
Thea Proctor's cousin

Max Meldrum - Melbourne painter, advocate of tonal colors

Basil Burdett - art writer and curator of the 1939 Herald
Exhibition of Modern Art.

Leon Gellert - a poet, co-editor of Home .

The numbered aphorisms are by Margaret Preston, and were selected from, 92 Aphorisms
by Margaret Preston and others in, **Margaret Preston Recent Paintings (1929)**

MARGARET TEACHES THEA

No. 4 One cannot teach art, only point the way for the other to find it for himself.

- MP Damn it! This gouge is blunt.
Bill, Bill, are you there dear? You did pick up those gouges I ordered- didn't you? -Well, where are they ?This one's absolutely useless- it wouldn't make an impression on a block of cheese- I'm sure I looked- Oh, alright I'll look again.. Yes., dear they were right, they were right where you said- under my, very pugnacious nose- Thank you dear.
- TP Than you, No, no don't bother, I'll announce myself - Margaret, Hullo, ...I'm so glad you're home. I rang before I left town and no-one knew where you were.
- MP Thea, Hullo- you surely didn't think I'd forget?
- TP I am so relieved you're back. I hope I've brought everything you said.
- MP That reminds me - I have something for you - it's here somewhere- Customs finally cleared our trunks, but not until poor Bill had been down to the wharves to hurry them up.
- TP Oh, thank you dear, it's quite ...lovely !
- MP Its not at all lovely Thea, it's simply practical. See! And just look at that curve. It's perfect and not the least bit symmetrical. See, if you turn it over, it's quite a different story. It works splendidly as a whole, don't you think?
- TP Yes and look, minute flecks of something - like mother of pearl? If you hold it up to the light, you can just see them
- MP I hadn't noticed them before.
- TP So you see it really is lovely and... so useful
- MP Enough of all this, we've work to do. You have brought an apron? You can't possibly work in those clothes...
- TP This wood is beautiful- what is it?
- MP Huon Pine- I used to use Turkish Box, but its far too expensive here
- TP Where's the ashtray? .. Which of these would work?
- MP Here, oh be careful of the ink, it's a cow to remove... That drawing I think, there's plenty of contrast; the other one's bit too finicky for a beginner. You intend to trace it then?

- TP Yes, I thought...
- MP I draw straight onto the block. I find the grain has its own life.
- TP I wouldn't like that
- MP You'll need a gouge- I'd start with that one - it's reasonably fine
- TP Which one do you like?
- MP That one's my favorite. You can have this block to play with. No, No hold it like this- See, firmly - Let the wood lead you- Angle it like this
- TP How deep should I go?
- MP More, if you want the line thicker... Take the hammer... Now, hold the block like this...
- TP I'll need three hands ...
- MP Not if you do it like this
- TP mmmm... I see what you mean...it's not at all like lithography... oohh I've gone off the line I'll have to start again
- MP No, you won't- Let me see - No, you can incorporate that...you can see the advantages of working directly... While you're doing that, I'll go on with this. I finished cutting it yesterday
- TP Are they Gum blossoms?
- MP Yes, they're quite unusual. My contact in the Botany Department lent them to me... You'll soon see why the apron's essential. Working up the ink is a messy business
- TP Where do you get your inks?
- MP From Japan- it's oil based, that's why it takes so long... the paper is Japanese and quite porous.
- TP You can even see the specks of leaves in it.
- MP Now just put the paper over the block and smooth it on with this.. from Japan also - but a squeegee would do... Do you want to have a go? The pressure must be even
- TP And you just keep rubbing?

- MP Don't forget the corners and the border -right, right- I think that's probably ready. Now for the tricky bit...
- TP Are you sure it's ready?
- MP We'll know soon enough if it's not - this bit's critical- No hesitation.
- TP That's extraordinary, there it is! What do I do with it?
- MP Hang it over there to dry. That's the proof, I'll pull the others later
- TP Well, have you thought about it? You can't keep on with the Royal Society - they're complete fuddy duddies about modern work.
- MP I should have known that question was coming ... I know, you're right- I have thought - I shall join.
- TP Then we can expect Mrs Preston's woodcuts to be shown at the next Society of Artists Exhibition?
- MP Yes, so long as Miss Proctor shows her recent woodcuts.
- TP I shall, I shall.. and what's more I shall nominate you for our Selection Committee - you'd love our meetings, they're absolute bun-fights- I could use your support- the men can be so timid.
- MP She did, but we failed to win. Syd Ure Smith thought one woman was more than enough!
- TP In the end he lost. Lambert and I formed the Contemporary Group and left the Society to wither away.

WOODBLOCK PRINTING DANCE

No 5. Do not learn too long. Art that is learned is only second hand.

ATTACK

- TP A piece of wood, a knife, some ink and a sheet of paper; that is the beginning
- MP The wood will be the first consideration. The best kind that cut across the heart, which minimizes the difficulties of grain. For example Turkish Box...
- TP Sycamore or Cherry ...
- MP or Huon Pine

CAPTURE

- MP Woodblocking is one of the easiest of all crafts in the way of materials
- TP The knife can, at first be a pocket knife, a small gouge is also needed; a tube of black oil colour and laundry paper
- MP or any that is slightly absorbent will do.
- TP To print the block ...
- MPa tin tray to put the ink on and a photographers squeegee to rub over the paper when it is on the block
- TP And the amateur craftsman is set up

RUB AND PRESS

- MP A craft is absolutely a matter of the combination of the hand and brain
- TP As soon as these partners are separated the result is incompleteness

RELEASE

- TP The paper is put on the inked wood and rubbed over with a clean squeegee until sufficient ink has been absorbed by the paper
- MP Which is then quickly pulled off the block and the result will be shown on the reverse side

PRESENT

- TP It is a friendly little craft
- MP and also, if you are lucky, a paying one

(source: 'Woodblocking as a Craft'; Margaret Preston, Art In Australia, October 1930)

I AM: YOU ARE

No.62 Art is the autobiography of each individual artist

- TP I am a big woman who feels tall and light
- MP I am a tall woman who feels big and solid
- TP I owe everything to fantasy
- MP I owe everything to science
- TP For me tables are dressing tables and card tables
- MP Tables are laboratory tables and kitchen tables, and I have a work table
- TP I never married but I was once engaged
- MP I was never engaged but I did marry
- TP Late
- MP I went overseas to learn but I saw
- TP I went abroad to see but I learnt
- MP Born in Adelaide, studied in Melbourne, taught in Adelaide, lived in Sydney
- TP I was born in Armidale, studied in Sydney, taught in Sydney and could be said to have lived in Sydney. I designed covers for HOME magazine
- MP My paintings were used on the covers of HOME.
- TP We lived to a grand old age. I was 87 when I died
- MP I was 88.
- TP My name is Alethea Mary. Alethea is first; it is pagan. My Bohemian mother desired to shock. But Mary is devout and belies it.
- MP My name is Margaret Rose. Margaret is first; it is plain as my Quaker mother intended, but Rose follows and is more romantic.
- TP I supported myself and I supported her work
- MP I was supported by my husband and her praise and pushing. We exhibited together once.
- TP We showed together, only once.
- MP I was an artist and a teacher
- TP I was an artist and I taught for a living.

ART IN AUSTRALIA: The critical view

No.11 Painting is a personal matter; it should be judged from the point of view of the artist.

- TP Whereas Margaret Preston designs from colour, in the manner of Gauguin and frequently to arbitrary scales; Thea Proctor designs from form and shape.
- Basil Burdett, Art in Australia, 1932
- MP Abstract designs are absolutely essential for such materials as pottery and glass. The Greeks were certainly on the down grade when they began to plaster their vessels with figures.
- Margaret Preston, The application of Aboriginal Art, Art in Australia, 1930
- TP Modern Painting seeks a design which is, and which appears constructed.
- Sydney Ure Smith, Art in Australia, 1926
- MP Art is not cosmopolitan; it is only the globe-trotter in mind who says that. Our saving grace is our distance from contaminating sources. We have teachers and wonderful prints to help us and the rest must come from ourselves, and the beginning should come from the home and domestic arts.
- Margaret Preston, The Indigenous Art of Australia, Art in Australia, 1925
- TP Why not walls of yellow wash or pink, and any other gay colouring such as one sees in Southern Europe? The climate, the atmosphere, the very configuration of Sydney cry out for these.
- Thea Proctor, The Home, 1922
- MP The art of the Aborigines has far too long been neglected; it is great art and the foundation of a national culture for this country.
- Margaret Preston, Aboriginal art, Art in Australia, 1941
- TP Australia should be grateful to Mrs Preston for having lifted the native flowers of this country from the rut of disgrace into which they had fallen by their mistreatment in art and craft work.
- Thea Proctor, Art in Australia, 1927
- MP Border designs are always useful; this one from an Aboriginal dancing board could be drawn and worked by the veriest amateur.
- Margaret Preston, The Indigenous Art of Australia, Art in Australia, 1925
- TP New colour experiences were capable of all kinds of practical translations, particularly interior decoration.
- Basil Burdett, Art in Australia, 1932
- MP It should not be supposed from the very definite classic basis of firm drawing and design underlying Thea Proctor's work, that more exotic elements are lacking.
- Basil Burdett, Art in Australia, 1932
- TP While Margaret Preston's work still kept its brilliant light, the colour became gradually richer and more intense, until after a visit to the Islands, it developed into a positive voluptuousness of sumptuous colour.
- Thea Proctor, Art in Australia, 1926

MARGARET AND THEA MAKE THE ACQUAINTANCE OF
THE MASTERS

No. 85 There are masters of art and art masters.

- TP The Great Men of Australian Art taught and advised us.
- MP Tom Roberts, Arthur Streeton, Frederick Mc Cubbin
and Charles Conder
- MP The Heidelberg mainstream
- TP And some of its tributaries
.....
- TP When I was twelve my parents divorced and we lived with my grandmother. My early contemplation of the violin, if not my study of it, paid off and at fifteen my painting of a violin won a prize in a competition judged by Sir Arthur Streeton.
- MP When I was twelve we finally found someone to teach me to bake colours onto china. At thirteen I won a prize for a painted plate.
- TP The following year I began studying at Julian Ashton's School in Sydney, there I met George Lambert and Sidney Long
- MP We moved to Melbourne and under Mc Cubbin's gentle tutelage I began to learn. But my studies are interrupted. We have to go back to Adelaide. My father has been admitted to an Insane Asylum and he died there soon after. Years later I will refer to this as "a domestic upset". I don't think I ever knew him.
- TP After just two years, I have to leave Ashton's - money is short- and it is felt that it can be better spent on my brother's education.
- MP In Adelaide, I attend Life Drawing classes with Hans Heysen, apparently he thinks I am a hussy because I sit so close to the model. I have so much to catch up. In Melbourne I always got the worst place and ended up at the back of the class doing still lifes of eggs and onions.
- TP Lambert has won the Traveling Scholarship and he is off to England. Yet he says, He is twenty-four and what has he done?
- MP I have a studio and I have begun taking students. At weekends I do my own work - sunsets and ladies do not interest me.
- TP Lambert has married Amy Absell. She was also a student at Ashton's . Two days later they leave for England.

- MP My mother dies and I am her sole beneficiary. I am still teaching and saving all I can. I know I must go away if I am to learn more.
- TP I am engaged to Sid Long - he is not exactly a comet to attach oneself to- he shared a studio with Lambert. Sid paints me over and over - and always I look so melancholy. His best picture of me is quite ethereal. I am standing on tip of a hill in a white dress. I look terribly tall - which I am. There are clouds about my head as if I'm an angel or the Virgin Mary . Perhaps its because he is so short.
- MP I am going to Europe with one of my students, Bessie Davidson, as a 'chaperone'- I am twenty -nine.
- TP I have broken off my engagement with Sid. My mother and I are going to England. I am twenty-five.
- MP Bessie and I are in Munich. We go to classes and after Venice and the Titians and the Rubens - so much paint and so much flesh - it's a relief! At first- but German Art is even worse - in a different way - I can't bear it, the colours make me sick.
- TP I want to study at the Royal Academy but Tom Roberts suggests another school first. I learn nothing and ruin my eyes in the process.
- MP Paris is no better - but I must get to the bottom of this madness- I am haunted by blue horses and pink dragons. I find a teacher and he sends me to the Musee Guimet to study Japanese Art.
- TP I am drawing and modeling for Lambert. His portrait of me has been accepted by the Royal Academy. Amy and he have a baby and they all live in the Rossetti studios in Chelsea. I live nearby and visit everyday.
- MP Suddenly it begins to make sense - there is more than one way to see. A painting is not just of something, it is something - it can even just fill a space I am drunk on the flat kimonos of colour in the Japanese prints . I must see more.
- TP I have met Augustus John - He is a friend of Lambert's . There are societies, committees , pageants and balls to organize - Chelsea seems to revolve around Lambert's latest scheme. I go to the theatre as often as I can - I have seen Diaghlev and the Ballet Russe and I am intoxicated by the costumes as much as the dancing
- MP My money has run out. I must go back to Adelaide and teach again. Bessie is able to stay on in Paris. Her money does not run out.

- TP It is 1908. Conder has introduced me to painting on silk- I am doing fans and water colours. Years later I will regret Conder's influence and wish it had been Cezanne instead.
- MP I am teaching the young ladies of PLC Adelaide and am painting loud, bright flowers on even louder backgrounds .My friends despair - "just when you were beginning to sell. "
- TP Lambert has many commissions now; though many of them are odious to him. He has painted and drawn me so many times, that had I a commission for every time he painted me, I would be... yet, I am learning so much from his sure line in drawing.
- MP I am still painting, teaching and saving- this time the piling up is quicker.
I have done a portrait - on commission- of Catherine Helen Spence, the Adelaide Feminist and Writer. It is good but conventional.
- TP Tom Roberts has organized us all in a pageant in honour of the Australian politicians visiting London. Lambert plays the "Spirit of Australia" - as an Aboriginal! Amy and I make the costumes.

THE GENTLE ARTS OF TEA AND FLOWERS

No. 39 Every aesthetic experience is dynamic and therefore involves distortion.

- MP The Japanese Tea Ceremony was an improvised drama, whose plot was woven about the tea, the flowers and the paintings.
- TP Teatism was a cult founded on the adoration of the beautiful among the sordid facts of everyday life.
- MP We have good tea and bad tea, as we have good and bad art- to differentiate the former we look to HOME magazine and to know the latter, to Art in Australia.
- TP And presiding over all is Sydney Ure Smith, our most venerable Tea Master
.....
- MP I see the table is set
- TP Would you like tea first, or after?
- MP After- the tea can wait, the flowers must be wrestled with first. I'll work here, I know exactly what I want to do.
- TP No, not yet. I think we should decide on basic principles and draw up some plans before we start fiddling with the flowers.
- MP I would rather work directly - unimpeded by forethought.
- TP Margaret, you're surely not going to use those?
- MP What? The gum tips - yes- you object?
- TP They should be left in the bush, and are positively ugly in a flower arrangement.
- MP But these are extraordinary- the geometry of this spiral of leaves is fascinating. I've been trying to work out the ratio of the distance between the leaves and their length... See, how they come directly from the branch- no stem at all.
- TP And what have you discovered?
- MP I haven't - yet- my maths is very primitive
- TP You quest for such mysterious relationships amazes me.
- MP Mathematical, not mysterious.

TP Wasn't it musical scales and colours last time?

MP It still is- one search does not preclude the other.

TP But you can't even play the piano.

MP That hardly matters, I don't want to play my paintings- merely to do them better.

TP They are still very ugly. I won't let you use them.

MP I paint them all the time.

TP Painted they are interesting - but amputated, in the flesh, in a vase - they are neither interesting nor pleasant.

MP The guest should not disagree with the host otherwise the tea will be spoiled.

TP I've plenty of other greenery you can use - camellia tips, herringbone fern...?

MP Do think these butterflies need greenery?

TP Butterflies! Good God, No! ... That would be too hectic.

MP From New Guinea - they are so gorgeous- lurid green with black borders- I thought with scarlet and pink hibiscus. What do you think?

TP Mmmm... very strong, but I like it. You'll need to use this. But not like that, it's too symmetrical.

MP For Flower-arranging, as for the art of the Aboriginal is the realm of the unsymmetrical.

TP Design must have a dynamic order. The Victorian bouquet with its circles of colour is static and without life.

MP Flowers must be chosen for both colour and shape.

TP Unless like these azaleas they have no shape to speak of, in which case the colours are the basis of the design, and strong contrasts of colour are not only possible, but desirable.

MP Vermillion Red, Magenta and Orange

TP Contrasts which the professional florist abhors - believing only in colours that tone!

MP In the tea room the fear of repetition is a constant presence. If you have a living flower, then a painting of flowers is not allowed. If you are using a round kettle then the water pitcher should be angular.

TP And you tea service should not be painted with flowers, as mine is.

MP However if I choose to paint your tea set, as it is then the amateur artist who buys the painting has no right to decide that your knife and spoon which I painted in the foreground, were meant to be any straighter than I painted them.

TP And such an amateur, certainly has no right to paint over them. The nerve of the chap! To meddle with, in the vain belief, that he was improving on; 'Thea Proctor's Tea Party' .

MP If he thought it looked unfinished- he should have been pleased to complete it in his imagination.

TP Shall I pour? Cream and sugar?

MP In the delicate clatter of cups and saucers feminine hospitality is established. Strong, with a little cream and two sugars.

Source: The Book of Tea, Okakura Kakuzo c 1906

SOME WOMEN MARRY

No. 12 All art whether it be good or bad is expressing the artist's personality to some degree.

MP Thea whatever are you pulling such a face for? You do know you are quite beautiful - don't you?

TP Of course, it is the sort of thing one is made aware of... Though in my family it was rather taken for granted; in the same way that one was artistic; and had a place to assume, by degrees, in the world.

MP Still, I have never envied beautiful women, even those with talent.

TP Why, because you think they lack the urgency of self- definition that comes from being overlooked?

MP I was never overlooked.

TP That's exactly what I mean- I can imagine you as a little red haired girl- absolutely yourself and irrefutable from the moment you could talk- you spoke and the world jumped to answer your questions.

MP And didn't anyone answer yours?

TP No, not really. I stamped my foot and wanted to be noticed. In such a household it would have been easier to be unremarkable. There would have been a concern at such an affront to heredity; and a desire to make me. Instead I was simply another. It was much later before I knew what I wanted for myself.

MP And then?

TP I got it.

MP You sound as if it wasn't what you wanted after all.

TP In a way it wasn't. I strive to please others most of the time. Yet after so long the obvious inference is I like things that way.

MP Less risk?

TP Yes and No.

MP Is that why you never married?

TP I may still.

MP Of course you won't- not now. There's no need. Independence grows and fits - doesn't it?

TP Most definitely, I like my freedom- I am never lonely or at a loss for suitable consorts. Money has always been a bore- but I get by quite nicely these days with my classes and illustration work.

MP Yes, but what interests me is why you didn't then?

TP Marry? Who to? Not Sid Long?

MP George, George of course!

TP He was already spoken for, my dear

MP I know that, but what if something had happened to Amy - would you have married him then?

TP What a shocking thought! No, No I wouldn't have- it would have been most awkward; an admission almost - and so bourgeois. I never hankered after "Mrs George Lambert" you realise. I knew that much. It suited Amy. It would not have suited Miss Thea Proctor.

MP You have all you need, then?

TP More, I have all I want. We share our work and can talk about anything - and I am never left waiting.

MP and children?

TP I have Maurice and Constant- that was enough. You know I always felt Constant was my own child- not hers - I even used to think he looked like me. ...I have been fortunate to be so close to them all.

MP I could come at marriage - but not at children. I like them, they're often interesting, but I knew, even before I thought of marriage, that it's work or them. I chose my work.

TP And Bill?

MP Mmm- I never thought I'd marry. A husband was not in my scheme of things.

TP But you fell in love.

MP I was too old for that- things just fell into place. We, as they say, laughed at the same things, and shared a passion for travel. He had an ease about him- nothing to prove. I liked that.

TP and marriage?

- MP It agrees with me. I think I even work better.
- TP Domestic routine?
- MP No, I've managed to avoid most of that - companionship. Bill is one of the few people I really like spending time with. I could happily go off tomorrow - and not miss a soul.
- TP I couldn't, I need the society of the city - I like being among people. The love of friends is more important to me than anything.
- MP More than your work?
- TP Well, they are not exclusive.
- MP No - they need not be. That Viennese chap, Freud, talked a lot of rot but I do agree with him about love and work.
- TP What? -That they are both difficult?
- MP No, essential

IN EUROPE FOR THE DURATION

No. 56 Colour is an extravagance of the mind. Colour is the emblem of change.

- MP It is 1911 I am back in Europe. My student chaperone is Gladys Reynell. Two years is too long away. Paris throbs with the colours I have missed so badly.
- TP I have been to France and met my uncle John Peter Russell, the expatriate Impressionist painter. He has a French wife and a horde of beautiful children.
- MP Gladys and I are learning pottery in London from a Doultons man.
- TP In London I saw Roger Fry's Post Impressionist Exhibition. I do not care for Gauguin or Matisse.
- MP We are making some progress
- TP My grandmother has fallen ill and misses me, I return to Sydney. I've had three exhibitions here - mostly watercolours and drawings, and though the praise is welcome. I must go back to London.
- MP Finally I am feeling at home in London, when Crash! War breaks out.
- TP I know - its dreadful, we dock in Colombo tomorrow and many of the other passengers are taking the next boat home, but nothing, nothing, would induce me to turn back now.
- MP I am here for the duration, but I must get out of London. What can I do? I am not the sort to nurse or make munitions.
- TP I am studying lithography part-time at the Chelsea School, and in that world again- yet its absurd how poor I am. I cannot bear to prevail upon my relatives- so I am still hawking myself as a model for everyone else. My studio is freezing, but as a result my drawing is quick and sure, with an economy of line, others warmer, envy.
- MP It is even colder in the Devon Hospital where Gladys and I teach pottery and crafts to shell-shocked soldiers.
- TP Lambert has gone to the front as a war artist, so has Streeton. Tom Roberts's son and Julian Ashton's two boys are serving in France. Arthur Ashton is killed at Pozieres. Amy and I await Lambert's letters- and I help her with the boys- they are so grown he'll hardly recognize them- though thank God, they are still too young.
- MP I have built a kiln and make glazes from the rocks and plants I collect on the moors. I have taught the most severe cases basketry.

- MP These simple contactable crafts seem to help. I had not thought of Art as therapeutic before.
- TP Lambert writes that Palestine with its sunlight and Australian men and horses reminds him of the black soil plains of home.
- MP The war is over - and I am over the English, absolutely. I want desperately to come home and apply all I have learnt. I need the sun.
- TP We are going back. Lambert must complete his war paintings and new commissions await- every politician and Society woman wants to be done by - G. W. Lambert of New South Wales.
- MP There is an invitation to show in America. I take the long way home. On board ship amid ghastly organized games and boisterous patriotic toasts, I meet Bill Preston - ex AIF. He smokes a pipe and takes my work in his stride, that is to say, seriously. We marry in Adelaide and the reception is a grand affair at Chateau Reynella. I am forty four the marriage certificate says I am thirty-six, Bill is thirty-eight.
- TP I have found a studio in George Street above the Grosvenor Galleries. It is high and light. I will paint the walls white, the floor, blue and the furniture enameled in yellow. In the mornings I can hear the cries of the Chinese vendors and on a hot dry day the smell of ginger and sandalwood is in the air. The Celestial section of Sydney suits me. I am close to Circular Quay and the harbour ferry, so not far from my mother and grandmother. How lovely to be back. It's summer 1921.
- MP Bill and I are settled in a house in Mosman - it has turrets -suburban grandiose. The garden is quite proper in the front but falls away in a tangle of red and purple lantana and ancient outcrops of geometric cactus. From my window I can see the ship in the busy, working harbour and that awful meccano bridge being built, and from the wharf at the end of Musgrave Street, you can just see Sirius Cove and the corner of the flame tree Streeton painted in the nineties. I am the wife of a company director - Anthony Hordern's, a department store and Tooheys, a brewery. My mother-in-law thinks artists are mad.
- TP The editor of Art in Australia, Sydney Ure Smith has started a new womens magazine- HOME. He has asked me to do some covers. They pay fifty pound. I am teaching as well, I am an artist, I'm Thea Proctor.
- MP And I'm Margaret Preston.
- TP I have been wanting to meet you ever since I saw your work. I like it.
- MP Do you? I know your portrait. The famous Mr Lambert did not do you justice.

INTERIOR DESIGN : ABOVE THE MANTEL

No .81 Be square without being angular.

- MP Thea Proctor, If you were furnishing a room - what would you have above the mantel?
- TP A decorative painting of flowers on silk, purples and blues predominating, with a note of vermillion red in a white frame or a modern painting of a red and pink hibiscus in a white frame.
- Now, Margaret Preston what would you have above the mantle?
- MP Needlework - samples in frames or water colour painting - a gaily coloured print would do. Definitely no oil paintings in a bedroom
- And what do you have above your mantel piece?
- TP A Margaret Preston woodcut.
- And what is really above your mantel piece ?
- MP A Thea Proctor water colour .

Source : HOME July 1926

OF FANS AND FLOWERS

No. 26 Lines, masses of forms have a life of their own which is nearly always at variance with natural appearance.

MP Oh, No! Thea, it won't sit straight. Give me that tape measure again- Oh, blast now it's down on the other side. Oh, Thea I still don't know about this one- it should have gone to the incinerator like the rest.

TP Don't be absurd, Margaret, whatever do you think is wrong with it?

MP Look at this corner, the ink is horridly uneven.

TP But you always say that is the mark of handwork-"the irregularity of genius "

MP Yes, but Oh well, if you think it looks as if I intended that splodge - do you?

TP Yes, dear. Now if you're nearly ready we can go upstairs and I'll make us tea.

MP But Thea- I still don't know about these frames- don't you think untreated Pine would have been simpler?

TP No dear. The red lacquer is just right - the edge is so much more defined- the pine would simply have faded away.

MP Yes, yes you're right- they are meant to frame and hold the eye. Oh, heavens look at the time. I said I would ring Bill before 4 and its 4.30 already. Thea, what are you doing?

TP I can't decide, which do you think is best? The lavender crepe or the Dove grey and Cerise Pongee?

MP They both suit you, I can hardly see the difference.

TP But doesn't the cerise shriek at the magenta in this? Oh, I suppose it's alright, If I put this here and stand over there. And what about you?

MP I shall wear what I always wear to opening - the fawn slub suit, my tan straw cloche and beige gloves.

TP and look very North Shore matron.

MP But I am, my dear.

TP and I am very - ?

MP George Street Bohemian.

TP Those chaps across the street at The Bulletin will love it - "Suburban Banksia meets hot-house Camellia - Miss Proctor draws in the insipid French manner while Mrs Preston hacks at wood in the manner of the Australian axe-woman - Such an interesting pair!" Well, at least by Tuesday we'll know if it was worth it.

MP The critics hardly matter, unless they know what they are talking about - and that's rare- the public are the test!

TP "THE DAILY TELEGRAPH: Blaze of Colour...the largest collection of colour prints ever seen in Sydney is on view at the Grosvenor Galleries

MP ... in her collection of coloured wood prints and woodcuts. Mrs Preston should do much to revive an interest in our gorgeously coloured wildflowers"

Coloured wood prints- 4 Waratahs and 6 Birds of Paradise at 3 guineas each, 5 Hibiscus at 2 guineas and 7 Basket Australian Flowers at 1 guinea.

TP "The more reticent art of Thea Proctor has a charm of its own. It is preoccupied more or less with the elegancies of life...

MP but is sufficiently versatile to show that she is not tied to one class of subject"

TP Tinted Drawings - The Turban, The Pink Rose, The Turkish Dress, The Fringed Shawl, The Crinoline, The Fur Collar, The Blue Kimono, The Feathered Hat and The Victorian Bouquet at ten, ten, eight, eight, five, eight, nine, three and twelve guineas respectively.

MP "Margaret Preston's colour wood prints .. a new departure.. distinctly interesting.. Her actual skill in wood

TP ...cutting is quite negligible. It is deliberately crude and primitive looking.."

MP Woodcuts - 7 Jackasses at 15 shillings, 12 Gum Trees, 10 Flannel Flowers and 9 Native Flowers at 12 and 6 pence each...12 Protea, 15 Banksia, 7 Black Swans and 5 Circular Quay at 1 guinea each plus 3 Kookaburras, 10 kangaroos and 17 Gums at 10 and 6 pence each.

TP "Miss Proctor's dexterity of detail often fails to conceal faulty drawing. If, The Spanish Girl in No 30 for -

MP -instance straightened her elegant arm, she could almost touch the floor without bending her distinguished knee joints..."

- TP "THE SUN: Altogether it is a most interesting and stimulating exhibition which these two ladies have hung...
- MP and it is to be hoped that it will be met with the encouragement it deserves. "
- TP An interesting exhibition!
- MP Stimulating too!
- TP We are a success!
- MP A cup of the finest Lapsang Souchong is definitely called for
- TP To you, Mrs Preston!
- MP To you, Miss Proctor! But wait , No, No stop we must have the cake - a strawberry torte with frangipani cream, I ordered it especially.

MARGARET EXITS TO GET HER CAKE, MEANWHILE THEA TURNS TO SPEAK WITH THE OTHERS AT THE EXHIBITION.

- TP Amy , you look ravissant in that hat - I told George it would suit you- He was here a minute ago - there, over there by my arrangement , somewhat fiercely obscured by the Strelitzia. - Bill, how are you? - Margaret's upstairs getting our cake. Yes, we have sold a lot- though we won't exactly amass a fortune - of course Margaret is right about keeping prices down- but some of us do have to make a living- Oh, there's that wretched bell again. No, no, sit down - Basil will get it - Yes, he does look pleased- No, Basil, don't tease, I can't bear it. Let me read it.
"The Trustees of the Art Gallery of New South Wales would like to meet with Miss Proctor to arrange the purchase of The Swing, catalogue number 41 and The Flower Shop, catalogue number 36...

(THE CREAM CAKE INCIDENT...)

- MP Your torte, Miss Proctor!

MARGARET FLINGS THE CAKE AT THEA

- MP These things should not matter, but they do. It's one thing to be bought by one's friends - they have taste ergo they are friends , but the public - one must be seen by them- yet to be at the mercy of trustees is gross- they are no better than bookmakers. I'll have three guineas each way on Preston and five hundred pounds on Heysen - Actually it was four hundred and fifty on Heysen and five hundred and forty on Septimus Power and then they realised they had ten pounds over and someone suggested a flutter on Mrs Preston - at least he said, " It will only be a ten pound mistake" - Mistake! When I heard, I gave them an even bigger oil and so they go two for the price of one - and I was hung in the Ballarat Gallery.
- TP After this incident, variously and subsequently referred to; as the Cream Bun or Cream Cake Incident - it will be some years before Margaret Preston speaks to me. The end of my Coventry being signaled by a mysterious parcel from Kyoto- a thing of beauty itself. I cut the strings carefully - and inside was a book of Hiroshige Prints of twenty different fishes with a tasseled and brocaded cover. Some pressed cherry blossom and a jagged, fond note from Margaret fell out Within the month she was back in Sydney and we resumed our conversation as if the intervening years had pleated together.
- MP Isn't it delicious? I do so love strawberry torte, may I cut you some?

INTERVAL

MRS PRESTON'S KITCHEN DEMONSTRATION

No. 46 Why there are so many tables of still life in Modern paintings is because they really are laboratory tables on which aesthetic problems can be isolated

SOUNDS OF KITCHEN ELECTRICAL APPLIANCES.

MP Hullo everybody! I thought I'd start with a quick equipment check. For the working artist and housewife, equipment is all. Of course, if you haven't the right materials or the appropriate machine, you can improvise- I have often done so myself.

I learnt to cook the hard way by trial and error. When I first married I decided that the time had come to apply myself to understanding culinary theory and its application. Afterall Cookery is only a more ephemeral form of pottery and I was already adept at that - wasn't I? What, I thought is the simplest cooking process? A Rice Mould - an essential form - the thumb pot of the kitchen! So I consulted a recipe from a reputable source - followed it exactly- and- three days later I was still boiling that wretched pot of rice. Do you think it would ever set? Never! - the perversity of those pearl-like grains was beyond even my endurance - I immediately despatched a letter to the expert author - her reply was as terse and as unsatisfactory as the mould. I had indeed followed the recipe faithfully, accurately- the lady merely reiterated it. The moral - in simplicity be simple!

This evening's class on colour is a comparative demonstration of what I call "Cuisine Moderne", and that older alimentary practice known as the Meldrum School of indistinct food preparation named in honour of that well-known Melbourne painter and advocate of tonal colour, Mr Max Meldrum.

I shall prepare two dishes for you - a Gazpacho, a Spanish soup favoured by the working peoples of that country - and Salade Nicoise, a French Hors d'oeuvre - and in the preparation of these two dishes, I shall demonstrate the superiority of pure colour over the muddiness of the Meldrum School. The question of what these two dishes taste like is not at issue- that is a personal matter- I am interested in investigating the palette each recipe employs, and not the palate of the consumer. We all know about the public taste- in its mouth - it's not reliable - it can be educated and should be - But can it be trusted? I think not.

For the GAZPACHO,
tomatoes and sweet red peppers - red, red, redder than the red tiled rooves of Sydney, the red of Matisee, pure bright red.
Cucumbers and Capsicum - green and rich - the scientific complement of the reds in the tomatoes and sweet peppers
Olive Oil- golden and gleaming but sadly not a true colour; let alone that contradiction so often described today as "off-white" .

A rich palette of complementary colours for any painter and cook, but what does the Meldrum method require!

Firstly that half the ingredients - the tomatoes and the cucumbers are stripped of their skins - peeled of their pure colour- and it discarded as waste! Then all the vegetables and fruit are diced - leaving evidence of pure colour in the sweet peppers and capsicum. I will use tinned tomatoes for the sake of convenience as they are already peeled.

We are now ready for the final stage and the consummation of the Meldrum Method- the pulverization and indistinctness of colour which results. For the Meldrum School requires " the actual physical admixture of red and green " - sweet peppers and capsicum, and what is now left of the tomatoes and cucumbers - which are "resolved" or as we would say processed by the intervention of this labour saving electrical device.

SHE PUTS ALL THE INGREDIENTS INTO THE FOOD PROCESSOR AND SWITCHES IT ON.

Resolved into - the optical impression - and what an impression! If I were to lift this lid now, we could do an instant Meldrum on the ceiling of undetermined khaki brown - a fitting colour for a military uniform - to clothe the indistinct without distinction. Don't ask questions-process process... That Ladies and Gentlemen is the Meldrum Gazpacho!

Have you heard his latest raison d'etre- he argues that such colours are the mark of high culture. As the baby selects the gaudier of the two toys so the savage selects the most brilliant glass beads . Have you ever heard such missionary anthropology? Even if subdued colour was a mark of high culture - and it is not . Murk is not subdued it is murk.

Let us now explore Cuisine Moderne - a radical approach to food preparation in which pure colour is expressed and eaten in its full saturated richness. Like all good examples of Cuisine Moderne, SALADE NICOISE is an exercise in colour and shape.

The process is unprocessed.

Eggs- hardboiled - sliced to flaunt the bright sun yellow yolk

Red tomatoes - quartered

Green beans - stringed

Waxy white potatoes- sliced

Glossy black olives - whole

And anchovies for line

Selection, Slicing and Simplicity -

the preparation of the palette is the painting .

That's it for Lesson One: Colour - Goodnight everyone!

MISS PROCTOR CONDUCTS A PRACTICAL CLASS IN INTERIOR DECORATING
No 74 Decoration without ornamentation , Enough or too much.

TP Good Evening everybody. It is so kind of you to allow me the use of this charming but unexceptional room, to undertake this practical exercise. Since completing my Correspondence Course in Interior Design two years ago, I have undertaken numerous consultancies; but tonight is a first.

I've not before had the opportunity of taking a class in situ so to speak. However I feel such a frontal advance onto the battlefield with my small but enthusiastic army will have its own rewards and perhaps some victories! So I do hope you will take my suggestions and remarks, which could well be quite critical - in the constructive and progressive spirit, in which they are intended.
Is everybody ready? Good!

My aim this evening will be to transform - at least in our minds eye - this interior into a modern and more comfortable environment.

Now Ladies and Gentlemen, if you could just move behind me, so that you are in the best position to see exactly what I see. Thank you! I'm not used to doing this en masse, so I hope you will bear with me - and do stop me if I run on - too much. Now, there are two ways we could start- either with the Dos or the Don'ts.

I'll just make a quick check- excuse me! If you could just move aside- thank you

SHE INSPECTS EVERY PIECE OF FURNITURE IN THE AREA AND AFTER SOME DOUBT, APPEARS SATISFIED.

Thank heavens! - Not a sign of the dreaded Jacobean, that dark and knotty animal that lurks in the corners of every second Australian home. But we must be vigilant -Could you- yes, you- Would you mind checking the adjoining area?

Well? Not any! You're sure- and yes, go further go into that other area. Mrs Preston will assist you - though if I know her as indeed I do, she has probably already razed that particular field herself- she feels just as passionately as I do, about "Barley sugar protruberances"

And could you, and you scour the area for any examples of realistic designs on utilitarian objects and where possible and without doing yourselves any injury, make a pile of them over there, for removal later on.

And could you check for potted palms and aspidistras. Good - Oh? You're not exactly sure what an aspidistra looks like. Well! Just gather up any large oily leaved plants and put them outside- it would be safe to surmise that they would be of that vulgar genus. Finally could you make a quick check for any photographs - unless they are photographic reproductions of picture - and then of course only if they are good pictures.

Well, that is about it for the Don'ts - we have rid the area of all unsightly infestations. Yes, yes. Thank you, do put any photographs that distress over there. Fortunately this area is free of wallpaper of any description, so smudginess of pattern is not an issue.

Now that we have explored the territory we intend to annex -what will be our strategy? The floor or the walls? It hardly matters which we start with; the other must march in step with it .

I think a wooden floor is best - it can be stained or painted in a dark colour and presto you have a frame around any rug or carpet you place on it. Perhaps a patterned carpet in a clean bold design like those affected by the folk weavers of many countries, and then two smaller rugs in colours which pick up the less prominent colour in the patterned rug. I would put the patterned rug her and the plain ones over there

MARGARET APPEARS

Oh, Good heavens! I have run on - haven't I?

As it is, all is not lost, we have established the basis - and perhaps you could come back next week and complete our mission.

Thank you Ladies and Gentlemen for your attention and assistance.

END INTERVAL

SONG OF THE ARTISTS BALL

THE 1923 ARTISTS BALL
A GALA AFFAIR IN SYDNEY TOWN HALL

THEA PROCTORS ORGANISING IT
SO IT'S BOUND TO BE A HIT !

(A BALL - WHATEVER FOR? WHATEVER FOR?)

ENGLAND WANTS AUSTRALIAN ART
SO WE ALL MUST PLAY OUR PART

FINESSING FINANCING
THIS ANTIPODEAN EXHIBITION
WHICH IS THEA PROCTOR'S MISSION

SHE'S ORGANISED SUCH EVENTS BEFORE
IN FAR-OFF CHELSEA, BEFORE THE WAR

THE FAIR LADIES OF THE CITY
HAVE FORMED A COMMITTEE
ROSE BAY TO VAUCLUSE
NONE DARE REFUSE

EVERYONE MUST COME! COME EVERYONE!
THE CRÈME DE LA CRÈME, TOUTE MEME

DRESS TO IMPRESS
IN YOUR ANCIEST, FANCY DRESS

THE 1923 ARTISTS BALL, A GALA AFFAIR
AT SYDNEY TOWN HALL

(WHO CAME? WHAT DID THEY WEAR? DO TELL!)

MRS NORMAN LINDSAY WAS MARY QUEEEN OF SCOTS
WHAT?.....ROSE IN CLOTHES, THAT NORMAN CHOSE!
YOU ARE JOKING.. OH NO -WHO KNOWS?

LEON GELLER(T) WHAT A FELLER !

WENT AS LAMBERT'S SELF-PORTER- RATE
SAME CLOTHES - SAME POSE -SAME NOSE?

WHILE LAMBERT, LAMB-BUT- NO- MINT- SAUCE
WAS A PERSIAN PRINCE - A VERI-TABLE POTEN-TATE!

AT THE 1923 ARTISTS BALL,
A GALA AFFAIR IN SYDNEY TOWN HALL

COLUMBINA FLIRTED WITH FELIX THE CAT
AND THE MICHELIN MAN ALL PADDED AND FAT
DANCED JAZZ WITH PIZZAZZ ON A BEDOUIN MAT

FRANS HALS FOXTROTTERED
MRS SIDDONS TOTTERED
AND THE WATTEAU TABLEAU
WAS OH SO VIVANT!

AND THEA PROCTOR LOOKED A PICTURE
IN A BUSTLE AND A PARASOL
A PICTURE IN A BUSTLE AND A PARASOL

AT THE 1923 ARTISTS BALL
AT SYDNEY TOWN HALL

SO AUSTRALIAN ART GOT TO LONSDON
AND TWENTY EIGHT THOUSAND PEOPLE SAW -

SEVEN HEYSENS
SIX LINDSAYS
FOUR LAMBERTS
TWO PROCTORS
AND LONGSTAFF'S PORTRAIT OF NELLIE MELBA!

(WHAT? NO MARGARET PRESTON!
NO, NO MARGARET PRESTON!)

SOME WOMEN PAINT THEMSELVES

No. 29 Artists who are subservient to the physical beauties of their models produce only a higher form of illustration.

- TP The finishing touches? It's certainly there, now.
- MP Yes, I said I'd take it in tomorrow. There's an awful hooah about it - the Herald wants a photograph of me with it .
- TP "The first woman artist ever invited to submit her portrait to the Art Gallery of New South Wales" - Do you mind if I watch?
- MP Of course not, sit down - are you feeling alright? You look a bit peaky
- TP Yes, now. I've just taken my piece on Lambert into Syd. It's strange, I feel somehow more burdened now, than when he died- then it was grief and loss, horrible numbing loss. Now I'm not sure what I feel ...
- MP After writing it all down - were you satisfied with it?
- TP Yes, as much as it is possible to be. I do hate death, it forces one to make memorials and they are much harder to live with than memories. So fixed and removed. Writing it, I felt a responsibility to the future - not to the past - and that feels the wrong way round.
- MP What must be said publicly and thought privately are necessarily at odds. Do you feel you have been too impersonal?
- TP Yes, but I had to be for everyone - and I suppose particularly for myself.
- MP Well then there's no point in worrying - is there? Did you ever paint him?
- TP No - he would never allow it - he was much too vain. I sometimes did little sketches. Unobserved when he was working - caricatures really. He always said I was merciless- and overly preoccupied with blemishes. But he would never have sat - still, for me - or anyone actually. He would have been jumping up all the time to see what they were doing to him. No, it's quite unimaginable!
- MP Yet, you sat still for him.
- TP I was his model- he saw what he wanted in me.
- MP Do you think he really knew you?
- TP He recognized me, and every time he thought he had got me down and that it would be the last, but it never was. He was never satisfied.

He had begun another just before he became ill.

- MP Were you satisfied?
- TP I think they are good portraits - a fair likeness, a quality of truth - but they are not really about me are they?
- MP I couldn't bear to be painted by anyone- I'm sure I would not have done this if mine had been done as often as yours .
- TP That's funny - I can't think of anything more ghastly than a self-portrait. How do you model for yourself? It's paradoxical.
- MP I don't, I just look. But you must have done one in a mirror - late at night ?
- TP Once, when I first got back here . I'll show it to you - you would be amused. It's only a lithograph - an oil would have been intolerable. It's nothing like his.
- MP I wouldn't expect it to be..
- TP For a start, I'm not wearing a hat or tilting my head - I'm wearing my glasses and looking very intent - and although I'm looking straight ahead, it is as if I don't like being caught. My mouth is quite firm though.
- MP It is uncanny how similar he made you and Amy look. He was after a type wasn't he - The Lambert Girls?
- TP Yes, I suppose you're right - we could have been sisters . I'd much rather paint other people - women really. Even modeling for another is better .. but painting yourself is too...
- MP Revealing? Bill's portrait is the only one I've done in years - and now this.
- TP You've enjoyed doing it - haven't you? I sense a relish in each stroke.
- MP Yes- I feel in control.
- TP Detached- it's as if you looked into the mirror and said - "I am a bowl of Granny Smiths"
- MP And therefore what does this surface mean? How can I get that piece of skin?
- TP You didn't smile - did you?

MP No, I watched and held my palette .
TP Like a shield against yourself.
MP - against the world - a combat pose really - like a Japanese warrior.
TP So as not to be seen .
MP To be seen better. A cup, a flower, my own face, I go about them the same. Light and shade, weight and mass.
TP Expression escaped nonetheless- a warmth almost.
MP Oh, No, you flatter me Thea, warmth? Perhaps sturdy compassion.
TP - and a hint , only the slightest - of a tremble of self-doubt around the corners of the mouth?
MP No, never!

I WILL BE AN ARTIST

No. 27 Art is a problem of relationships

MP My mother named me Margaret Rose
TP Margaret! Margaret have you laid the table?
MP Yes, mother almost.
TP My mother named me Alethea Mary... Mama, can I watch you?
MP Oh, Thea I suppose so, you are such a starey child - I'm only dressing for dinner, and there's "nothing remarkable beneath the visiting moon" about that..
TP It's such a beautiful dress. I simply adore that greeny colour. It looks so pretty with your face.
MP It's not a greeny colour Thea, its emerald and I don't think it does a thing for my skin. Perhaps it does bring out those rather common auburn lights in my hair.
TP What's auburn Mama? Is it like red? Auburn will be one of my favourite colours. -Margaret, I thought I told you to use the other dish, that blue one is chipped.
MP I don't like that dish, the handles are ugly, they look like ears. See, mother! When you turn it upside down it looks like a koala.
TP Margaret put it back! You may not like it but I do- your father bought it for me
MP But look at the blue one with the peaches in it- they look like pink hills above the sea. - Thea, if you must watch - at least sit still and stop making those drole faces in the mirror.
TP I'm not I'm being a lady - and what's drole? Is my doll drole?
MP It's not drole Thea, not droll.
TP Mama, when granmama comes, can I show her all my new pictures?
MP Yes, but you musn't forget to play her that lovely Chopin etude you've been practicing - You have been practicing it, haven't you? I'm sure granmama thinks you're a fumble-fingers . You only ever want to show her your drawings and your mimics. I must make sure she sees Freddie's drawing- I do believe your brother has inherited the Russell eye. His picture of your Papa's horse was quite credible.

TP Oh, mama she knows I can play my violin! We like doing drawings together- she helps me - she's very good art noses and bonnets - but I'm better at lips and dresses. She says I'm almost as good as Uncle John - for my age. See Mama, this nose is much better, don't you think?

MP Not now poupette , find my garnet necklace

THEA IMITATES HER MOTHER

Thea, you are exasperating!
When can we go to the gallery again? I must see those people on the high stools again. They look so interesting . When?

TP Soon

MP When then- on Saturday? - and can I watch them drawing and smell that delicious smell - one day I am going to have a high stool and copy pictures in the gallery .

SOME WOMEN BURN

No.68 To be lucid, to know of what one is capable is the first thing for the artist.

TP You do not doubt yourself? Never?

MP I have often thought I should, more frequently than I do.

TP But you haven't found the time?

MP No I suppose I haven't . Should I make it?

TP Of course not- if you do others will only use it , But there are times when the program goes awry?

MP Of course

TP And your work, does it go awry?

MP The question does not arise. There's work to be done, problems to be solved, observations to be made, shapes, lines, colours - that's the art, the work done.

TP But you can't always know its right

MP Of course not- the results - if that's what you're driving at , vary - they often displease me when they please others.

TP Hence the incinerator.

MP Yes, fire proves, frees one from the slavery of revisions - to start again

TP And you always rise from the ashes?

MP Of course- I wouldn't burn, if I didn't rise- would I?

TP I suppose not. I never burn.

MP Oh Thea, I am sounding so knowing and convinced.

TP When the truth is that you are merely content and working

MP And you are not?

TP I am working and sometimes I know what I am doing, and I like it.

MP That's the same.

TP No, it's not!

I WAS / YOU WERE

No. 34 The work of a generation is not really understood before the coming of the generation which follows.

- TP The public knew me from a portrait he painted of me.
- MP The public knew my self-portrait.
- TP My family were upper Middle Class, but I was always poor, though no-one seemed to notice.
- MP My family were Middle Class, I married up, but no-one noticed.
- TP I had exquisite taste and unique style - I was a Modern woman.
- MP My work was Modern and a taste was found for it.
- TP I helped define that taste.
- MP The critics like my work and tolerated me. I often got good reviews.
- TP The critics loved me and seemed to tolerate my work. I was known.
- MP We were always plagued by horrid little men.
- TP Certain critics and artists - all men of course - found us formidable!
- MP When I was a student I sat too close to the model - when I was an artist I rarely painted people.
- TP Portraits and figure studies are among my best work- I always sit close to my model.
- MP For me its still life, nature mort.
- TP Not for me the cracked shell or the split fruit.
- MP If I am to paint them, they must be pared and broken.
- TP We often had tea together
- MP I threw a cream cake at her.
- TP I knew I was beautiful but I was not sure if it mattered.
- MP I wasn't, and I didn't .
- TP I loved the feel of materials and worked on silk and fine creamy paper in water colour, soft pencil and translucent inks.

- MP I liked texture, I worked on wood, canvas and rough hand-made papers with charcoal, gouges, rich Japanese inks, thick gummy oils.
- TP I chose my hats and gloves carefully and wore them on every occasion.
- MP I only wore them when I had to, under sufferance.
- TP ART in AUSTRALIA devoted a special issue to my work.
- MP ART in AUSTRALIA devoted a special issue to my work .
- TP The potential for precision and detail attracted me to woodblocks.
- MP I like the resistance of the block and its hard grain.
- TP I never went back to Europe: I never really left there.
- MP Europe held no more interest - I never returned - I traveled everywhere else.
- TP To smell the tight bunches of Parma violets at the flower stalls on the Quai D'Orsay
- MP To be outback under the wide sky in the endless red deserts between earth and the vibrant air...
- TP I will see young artists come and go. I will not like it all, but I will see it.
- MP I do not imagine I will advance in my art, only move. We will work in our separate ways for another thirty years
- TP We knew each other and were friends.
- MP We worked together, and for a time, saw a lot of each other.

END

NOT STILL LIVES

A play about Margaret Preston (1875-1963) & Thea Proctor (1879-1966)
by SUZANNE SPUNNER

Cast:

Margaret Preston - Meredith Rogers
Thea Proctor - Andrea Lemon

Director/Designer - Barbara Ciszewska
Director's assistant - Liz Honybun

Poster :

Designer- Meredith Rogers
Printers- Meredith Rogers, Liz Honybun,
Liz Walsh, Ken Harper, Mandy
and Melanie Salamon

Programme Designers- Suzanne Spinner and Liz Honybun
Based on the catalogue of Margaret
Preston and Thea Proctor's exhibition
at the Grosvenor Galleries in 1925

Video production: Open Channel - Andrea Philip, Jenny Harding, Melanie
Guiney, Kath Dyson, Trish Burke

Producer- HOME COOKING THEATRE COMPANY

First performance - August 25, 1982 at Iceberg Gallery,
Rankins Lane, Melbourne.

HOME COOKING THEATRE Co- grew out of a production entitled,
I Am Whom You Infer devised by Meredith Rogers and Barbara Ciszewska
and performed at La Mama theatre in Carlton in June 1981 and in the
Adelaide Festival in March 1982. While that show was in production in
Melbourne; the decision was made to form a theatre company devoted to the
creation of original Australian theatre with women at its centre; both as the
subjects of the work and its creators.

The founding members of Home Cooking Theatre Co were -
Barbara Ciszewska, Rosalind Hill, Meredith Rogers and Suzanne Spinner.
In May 1982 Andrea Lemon and Liz Honybun joined the company; later Mary
Sitarenos and Carmelina Di Guglielmo joined as well.

HCTC produced a number of other original productions -
Looking In Looking Out (1984) written by Andrea Lemon and
Running Up A Dress (1986), **Safe'n'Sound** (1987) and
Edna for the Garden (1989) written by Suzanne Spinner.

NOTES on HOME COOKING PRODUCTION

Due to the style of the production and the manner in which the play was
developed, I never wrote stage directions in the script but simply handed
over the words to the director and actors in the company as I wrote them.

The following are not so much retrospective stage directions, as a summary
record of the production of
NOT STILL LIVES realized by Home Cooking Theatre Co in 1982/3

DESIGN PREMISE - that art making as in painting and drawing would not be
represented literally nor would art objects - prints, paintings, et al much less
slides of same be shown or represented. This premise was a defining
characteristic of the first production and inherent in the original concept,
subsequent productions have not necessarily followed this principle.

SET:

Bare stage or if possible a gallery or studio space,
wooden floors and white walls for preference
Basic lighting - house lights on throughout performance

PROPS:

Wooden trestle table and trestle supports
Two wooden artists stools
Twelve coloured plastic raincoats
Twelve pairs rubber household gloves in assorted colours
Two dozen wooden clothes pegs
Two collapsible wooden clothes drying trees
Various lengths of dowel
Red tray, pink and white china teaset

COSTUMES

Thea - white blouse, flowing black silk pants, magenta stockings,
black tap shoes, discrete marcasite earrings,

Margaret - black jumper, grey flannel box pleated culottes, grey industrial
dust jacket, black stockings, black tap shoes

THE PRODUCTION

When the play opens, the stage/ a bare gallery is set with the trestle table and stools at the back

MARGARET TEACHES THEA

Recorded on a tape loop and played as the audience entered the theatre

WOODBLOCK PRINTING DANCE

Printmaking physicalised using the actor's bodies as the materials

I AM: YOU ARE

Tap Dancing sequence moving towards the audience

ART IN AUSTRALIA : THE CRITICAL VIEW

Actors began sitting at the trestle table as if in a library, they did everyday actions eg: quote on the art of the Aborigines - Preston opened the door leading outside the building and shouted it down the stairs.

MARGARET AND THEA MAKE THE AQUAINTANCE OF THE MASTERS

Combination of tap dance, walking pattern, mime and acrobatic movement

THE GENTLE ARTS OF TEA AND FLOWERS

Stylised elements of Japanese martial arts movement; trestle tabletop was dismantled and put on the floor to make a low platform on which they arranged the wooden clothes drying trees and decorated them with rubber gloves and wooden clothes pegs to represent flowers and foliage

SOME WOMEN MARRY

They put the "flower arrangements " around and set up the trestle again and sat on stools drinking tea.

IN EUROPE FOR THE DURATION

Combination of tap dance, walking pattern dance, mime and acrobatic movement- they dismantled the trestle and laid it flat against the side walls of the space

INTERIOR DESIGN ABOVE THE MANTLE

Using one stool which they alternatively sat on- the other asked the questions like a magazine reporter.

OF FANS AND FLOWERS

With the space cleared except for the "flower arrangements" - the brought in the pile of coloured plastic raincoats and proceeded to "hang" them on the walls using the lengths of dowel where necessary. The newspaper reviews were sent in on a pulley, announced by a whistle blowing, as they listed the work in the exhibition eg: Bird of Paradise, they put red sold stickers on the walls beside the raincoat pictures.

THE CREAM CAKE INCIDENT

When Margaret threw the cake at Thea - this was done as an abstract mime- she actually twisted Thea's head and pushed her down to the ground in slow motion.

INTERVAL

Sherry was served to create the atmosphere of a gallery opening

MRS PRESTON'S KITCHEN DEMONSTRATION

Colour video recording - real food, blender, kitchen setting. Preston made - gazpacho and Salade Nicoise

MISS PROCTOR'S CLASS ON INTERIOR DECORATION

Audience participation exercise - largely improvised by the actor using the main points in the script and working off the shapes and colours of the clothes people were wearing.

END OF INTERVAL

THE ARTISTS BALL SONG

Note done in HCTC production, could be recorded as a popular radio song which they listen to, interject and sing along to, while setting up the space.

SOME WOMEN PAINT THEMSELVES

Thea sat despondently on a stool watching Margaret ostensibly at work on her self-portrait - this was suggested by a trestle end resting upright on the floor; basically it was an abstract mime of the elements of the portrait.

I WILL BE AN ARTIST

Each actor alternately plays herself when a child and the others mother and this was achieved through mime, transformational acting, vocal changes etc.

SOME WOMEN BURN

As they speak they are dismantling the exhibition - taking down the raincoats, folding them, dismantling the "flower arrangements' packing up pegs and gloves- by the end it is bare except for the two stools.

I WAS: YOU WERE

Begins as a tap dance and ends with them sitting on the stools beside each other but looking away from each other; answering questions from an unseen and silent interviewer.

In 1989, **NOT STILL LIVES** was the basis of a thirty minute drama documentary film **TEA AND PICTURES**, written and directed by Suzanne Spinner with Genevieve Picot as Margaret Preston and Susan Lyons as Thea Proctor, funded by Film Victoria and the Womens Film Fund of the Australian Film Commission.

RESEARCH SOURCES

Ian North- The Art of Margaret Preston
Humphrey McQueen- The Black Swan of Trespass
Jan Minchin (in) - Thea Proctor: The Prints
Janine Burke - Australian Women Artists 1840-1940
William Moore - The Story of Australian Art
Bernard Smith- Australian Painting
Robert Hughes - The Art of Australia
Margaret Preston : Recent Paintings (and aphorisms)1929
ART in AUSTRALIA: Published Ure Smith -
Margaret Preston Number, 1927; Thea Proctor Number, 1932
HOME: published Ure Smith - issues from 1920-1935
Sundry material on George Lambert including Amy Lambert- Thirty Years
of an Artist's Life

THANKS to -

Bernard & Kate Smith, Jan Minchin, Rosalind Holinrake, Les Van Der
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Bridget Whitelaw and the staff of the print room of the NGV, Barry Pearce
and Sam Alcorn of the Art Gallery of NSW , the staff of the La Trobe
Library, State Library of Victoria.....for research advice and inspiration.

WRITERS NOTE -

My starting point was a sense of the striking differences between the
received and popular images of the two women; the self portrait by Margaret
Preston and the many portraits by George Lambert of Thea Proctor. The fact
these women apparently so dissimilar had been friends and worked together
intrigued me. It felt like the meeting of the Modern Woman and the
Victorian Lady, and seemed such a compelling dramatic image.

My interest in Margaret Preston and Thea Proctor was first kindled by the
1975 Ewing Gallery exhibition AUSTRALIAN WOMEN ARTISTS
curated by Janine Burke and organized by Kiffy Rubbo and Meredith
Rogers. My ongoing passion for theatre, visual art and Australian women's
history led to researching and writing NOT STILL LIVES, my first play.

SUZANNE SPUNNER



THEA PROCTOR

- 1879 Alethea Mary Proctor born Armidale, NSW
1891 Parents separate - lives with her mother, Kathleen and her grandmother, Christina Roberts in Mosman
- 1896 Commences art studies Julian Ashton's School; where she meets George Lambert
1902 Briefly engaged to artist, Sydney Long
- 1903 Leaves for England, studies St Johns Wood School
1904-12 Living in Chelsea, near George & Amy Lambert; Chelsea Arts Club, meets Conder, Augustus John, visits her cousin, Impressionist painter, John Peter Russell in France
- 1912 Returns to Mosman and exhibits in Melbourne and Sydney
1914 Leaves Sydney for London
- 1915-21 Part-time classes in Lithography, Chelsea School of Art
- 1921 Returns to Sydney, contributes cover designs and articles to HOME, completes Correspondence course in Interior Design
- 1924 Collaborates with Margaret Preston on an article about flower arranging for HOME
1925 Joint exhibition with Margaret Preston at Grosvenor Galleries, Sydney
1926 With George Lambert, forms The Contemporary Group
1929 Designs colour harmonies for Ford cars
- 1932 ART in AUSTRALIA publishes Thea Proctor Issue
Decorates Lacquer Room restaurant, Farmers, Sydney
1930s Teaching Design, advertising illustrations (eg. Berlei)
- 1942 Awarded Society of Artists Medal for developing taste in NSW
1946 Artistic advisor, Noel Coward's Tonight at 8.30. for JCW
1950s Regularly attending openings of avant garde work
1960s Painting and teaching
- 1966 Dies in Sydney, aged 86

NOT STILL LIVES

c Suzanne Spinner 1982

illustrations taken from the film storyboard for
TEA & PICTURES
by Suzanne Fegan, 1987

This artists book made by the writer, in 2005 for
Paradise Productions

