

AUSTRALIAN ARTISTS AND ARCHAEOLOGISTS IN THE SWEET LAND OF CYPRUS

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*She holds in her hands the fate of all things
From her eyes come gladness, impulse for life ...*

Hymn to Ishtar 17th century BC ¹⁶⁹

"Including artists was an experiment in an ongoing debate to widen the parameters of research" wrote Richard Green in 1996 on the occasion of the first Paphos Theatre installation, *Images, Vestiges, Shadows* held in the MacLaurin Hall, University of Sydney. "Artists", he suggested "produced results of a different order".¹⁷⁰ Artists and archaeologists are related in their passion for the material culture of the past, but each has a different way of looking and interpreting. The "impulse for life" identified in the ancient hymn to Ishtar/Aphrodite can be given nuance by the intricacy of archaeology. The inclusion of artists in the excavation of ancient architecture has proved a catalyst for looking freshly at the contemporary world.

The participation of the Senior Artists Research Forum from the University of Wollongong in the Paphos Theatre excavation in Cyprus in 2010 was the culmination of eighteen years of collaborations between artists in Wollongong and archaeologists at the University of Sydney and the Nicholson Museum. The enlightened scholarship of Director Professor Richard Green and Associate Director Dr Craig Barker welcomed the interaction of artists and archaeologists and fostered connections through a long sequence of exhibitions and installations. This began in 1992, even before the Cyprus excavations, with Diana Wood Conroy's Doctor of Creative Arts exhibition with Lindsay Duncan in the Wollongong City Gallery that showed objects from the Nicholson Museum lent by Professor Alexander Cambitoglou.¹⁷¹

Art and theatre lecturers from the Faculty of Creative Arts have participated in the Paphos Theatre Excavation since 1996. The installation *"Out of Oblivion": Paphos Theatre Excavations Cyprus (1998 -1999)* presented a semi-circular vertical grid installation illuminated with opaque archaeological drawings, as well as artworks in small boxes. The curator Diana Wood Conroy pointed out at the time that "the fragments of clay, glass, metal and painted plaster documented in drawing and photography within the grid of archaeological process give coherence to the life of the theatre". Precise material documentation can be combined with the span of the imagination to form new relationships to ancient traditions.¹⁷²

The next iteration of the Paphos theatre was *The Painted Wall: passages in archaeology* at the Faculty of Creative Arts Gallery, Wollongong in 2001. Opened by Richard Green, it included gouache studies of the rare painted plaster fragments from the *parodos* of the theatre.¹⁷³ A digital reconstruction of the painted wall by Hilary Rhodes, a University of Wollongong doctoral candidate in media art, allowed the viewer to move along the length of the wall and perceive what images might once have existed. Because painted frescoes were related in iconography and function to textiles, the exhibition included woven tapestry.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ Quoted by J. Karageorghis: *Kypris: the Aphrodite of Cyprus* (Nicosia 2005) 19. The 'Sweet land of Cyprus' comes from Leontios Makhairas *Recital concerning the Sweet land of Cyprus entitled Chronicle*, 1474, edited with a translation and notes by R.M. Dawkins (Oxford 1932).

¹⁷⁰ *Images Vestiges Shadows: Paphos Theatre Installation*. Catalogue. A collaborative Project between The University of Sydney and the Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong, Essay by J.R. Green. Designed by Phillippa Welfare and John Senczuk. Artistic Consultant: Grahame Bond. Artists: Lynne Brunet, Robyn Outram, Anna Sophocles, Rowan Conroy. Curator and artist: Diana Wood Conroy. 2 October 1996.

¹⁷¹ Diana Wood Conroy (BA Hons Archaeology, University of Sydney 1966) and Lindsay Duncan: *Archaeologies: Images, Vestiges, Shadows*. Wollongong City Gallery, 8-26 July 1992. Essay by Sue Rowley. Seventeen objects from Egypt, Greece and Rome were lent from the Nicholson Museum collection.

¹⁷² *"Out of Oblivion": Paphos Theatre Excavations Cyprus*. Catalogue. A collaborative exhibition between The University of Sydney and the Faculty of Creative Arts, University of Wollongong with the Faculty of Environmental Design, University of Canberra. September 1998 to February 1999, in the three venues. The artists included Diana Wood Conroy, Celeste Goulding, Christine Holland, Susan Ingram, David Looong, Marcie McConville, Helen McCosker, Tim Martin, Helen-Joy Suliman. See: H. Musa, "Ancient Cypriot Culture on View", *Canberra Sunday Times*, February 21 1999; A. Sarzin, "Archaeologists reveal ancient theatre and inspire artists" *University of Sydney News*, November 12 1998, 7.

¹⁷³ D. Wood Conroy (with an appendix by J. Atkinson), "Roman wall-paintings in the Pafos theatre", *RDAC* 2003, 275-301.

¹⁷⁴ *"The Painted Wall: passages in archaeology"* Catalogue. Exhibition of images and processes from the Paphos theatre excavation. D. Wood Conroy. Catalogue with Introduction by K. Lawrence AM and J.R. Green, University of Wollongong, July 2001.

In 2006 the project *Sonic Architectures: Mapping the ancient theatre in image and sound* explored the way the ancient theatre could give contemporary artists new imaginative insights in working at the cutting edge of electronic technologies. The resonant acoustic signature of the Greco-Roman theatre at Paphos was formed by the innate hardness, density and even crystalline structures of its architecture. Sandy limestone (as bedrock and cut blocks), marble, granite, at least three distinct grades of plaster for seating and walls, pebble and marble mosaic floors combined in the curved architecture of the theatre. The exhibition drew on the parameters of visual and sonic mapping of the ancient theatre, by constructing a parallel cross-disciplinary alliance across the senses of sight, sound and touch.¹⁷⁵

The exhibition *"Who has the amphora handle?" Responses to Cyprus* in September 2011¹⁷⁶ explored collaboration and interaction between leading Australian visual artists and performers at the University of Wollongong who formed the Senior Artists Research Forum.¹⁷⁷ SARF worked on the Paphos excavation in October 2010 in order to understand a wider parameter for their research, in an island with a highly developed archaeological and art history, as well as a postcolonial, focus on a bitter past. The title reflected the constant to and fro of discussion and argument within the Forum.

The Nicholson Museum exhibition *Aphrodite's Island* shows small works in bronze by sculptor Penny Harris, a text by performance artist Nikki Heywood, photographs by Derek Kreckler and Jacky Redgate (CCANESA in 2013), a drawing by Lawrence Wallen and tapestry by Diana Wood Conroy. All refer to experiences at the Paphos Theatre excavation.

Just as Aphrodite's complex mythology has many aspects from chthonic to oceanic and heavenly, the rich world of archaeological fieldwork and scholarship may provide artists with a glinting and different way of being in the twenty-first century.



Penny Harris, *Doubt's garden: Shirt*. Bronze, c.15 cm x 15cm, 2011



Diana Wood Conroy, *Among the bones, music*. Wool and linen tapestry fragment, 20cm x 20cm, 1998

¹⁷⁵ *Sonic Architectures: Mapping the ancient theatre in image and sound*, Faculty of Creative Arts Gallery, September 2006. Artists were Diana Wood Conroy: (Texture and touch,) Brogan Bunt: (Video, sound and programming), Diane Epoff: (Digital photographic mapping), Ian McGrath: (The acoustics of voice). Stephen Ingham: (Sonification of visual data).

¹⁷⁶ *"Who has the amphora handle?" Response to Cyprus*. Senior Artists Research Forum, 16 August - 8 September 2011 Faculty of Creative Arts Gallery, University of Wollongong. The artists were Nikki Heywood, Jacqueline Gothe, Derek Kreckler, Tim Maddock, Deborah Pollard, Jacky Redgate, Lawrence Wallen with Penny Harris and Diana Wood Conroy.

¹⁷⁷ The Senior Artists Research Forum (SARF) offered leading artists at the University of Wollongong the opportunity to develop a research project that reflects on their existing body of work in order to achieve a PhD or Doctor of Creative Arts degree (DCA) within 12 to 36 months. Candidates have a substantial national/international reputation for highly resolved and innovative work and many hold senior academic positions or are noted independent practitioners. The focus of study is the interaction of theory, criticism and practice from a creative perspective, building on substantial skill and experience. A Vice-Chancellor's Challenge Grant permitted intensive seminars and excursions since the beginning of 2010.