



James C. Sourris Artist Interview Series

Normana Wight

Noreen Grahame: Now Normana, this series has given me a wonderful opportunity to speak with you about your career which spans some 50 years, but I'd like first of all to start in 1993 with something that Ian Howard said, that it's courageous of a senior artist to turn her established working process upside down and leap into the unknown, but I think this is something that you've always done.

Normana Wight: Mm, I was told it was a failing at first and then -- but I have this temptation to try exciting new media particularly.

Noreen Grahame: Yes.

Normana Wight: [LAUGHS] And in the last, what, 30 or so years, or even 40 years actually, things like photography in art, photography in printmaking, and then the computer came in. I didn't have a computer for a long time. Everybody else where I was working got a computer on their desk.

Noreen Grahame: But they used it for administrative things, not for...

Normana Wight: Mostly, yes. I suppose they thought I was just playing but the image processing possibilities were just dazzling. '93 when I went to -- spent the year in Brisbane, things were galloping along and we scanned things, put them on the computer, juggled with them, with rather agricultural image processing tools and it was a matter of you trying a lot of things and then -- and discarded all the ones that were completely whoopsy and then captured and kept the few that weren't.

Noreen Grahame: Your experience with photography would have also come into play in that new environment.

Normana Wight: Yeah, I think so. Mm. I learned about photography in Melbourne. The art school I was working at had a little darkroom. One of the students showed me how to process film. Off I went; I spent the weekend at the art school printing the photographs.

Noreen Grahame: Mm-hmm, the same time that you learned to use the photography -- photographs in screenprinting?

Normana Wight: Oh look it all sort of [LAUGHS] --

Noreen Grahame: Gelled together somehow.

Normana Wight: -- interwove.

Noreen Grahame: Yeah.

Normana Wight: But the big paintings and the big non-figurative prints, I didn't know where to go from there because I had been taking lots of photos and I felt I needed an image - so much for Clement Greenberg - and I was having problems with a gallery at the time, so I thought mm, I've got to find a way of being an artist without a gallery. I made postcards about a sort of diary. It began to really sort of flourish.

Noreen Grahame: In the '90s, or after your fellowship at QCA you really experimented with digital printmaking.

Normana Wight: Oh well, well the technology just pheeww, soared.

Noreen Grahame: Yeah, just opened up, mm.

Normana Wight: It was very good and the price of computers came down in a spectacular way.

Noreen Grahame: Can you tell us a little bit about the experimentation and the technology there?

Normana Wight: Well you don't really think about it as experimentation, you just do it.

Noreen Grahame: Do it.

Normana Wight: Well I suppose over those few years from about '95 or so when I did this water print, technology suddenly became much more sophisticated. The memory, their ability to pack memory into these files just increased. Of course with the floppy discs, you know, it was that or nothing.

Noreen Grahame: Where do you think this is leading you in your work?

Normana Wight: Well, well it was Lyndall [Malani 04:17] who said, "What are you going to do next?" And I said "Well, it's getting over the fact that the Queensland Art Gallery bought a painting that I did in 1970 and suddenly there's interest in these ancient works." And she said "Well it could go full circle."