

Reflecting on Connections

Sarah Northcott (Curator), 2020

Ann Newmarch (OAM) is perhaps most well-known for her contribution to screen-printing and for her politically charged works in a variety of media and styles. At the same time Newmarch has been active in her local community; forging connections through art and activism in the Adelaide suburb of Prospect where, since 1976, she has had her residence and studio. From here she has created hundreds of political screen-prints, paintings, photographs, installations, sculptures and handmade objects.

Reflecting on her practice, there are many connections at work: connections to Prospect where Newmarch is a resident and has been a major catalyst for its thriving community arts, to the arts in Adelaide more broadly, where Newmarch has connected through artist collectives, and as a lecturer. There is also connection in terms of the familiar feminist refrain of the personal is political: the connection between private experiences and larger political structures; connecting the experiences of domestic and community life, being a working artist and a teacher, a feminist and an activist.

Selected works, from key exhibitions and series, collected by institutions, friends, neighbours, and fellow artists, as well as works from the artist's studio, present a snapshot of Newmarch's practice that visits major themes of her work: feminism, worker's rights, collectives, Indigenous Australia, community, animal rights, family and motherhood and cultural patterning.

A distinguished artist, well-represented in national institutional collections, Newmarch is also a pioneer of the Community Arts movement in South Australia. In recognition of which, she received an Order of Australia Medal in 1989. Active within groups and associations in Prospect, Newmarch also built strong connections with the local Council, starting with an artist residency in 1982. From here she sparked

many of the arts activities that Prospect is known for – like Stobie pole painting, murals and the Community Art Show.

Newmarch's Beatrice Street studio, a large shared workshop space, has for many years been a base for artists and community groups, including the Prospect Mural Group, of which she was a founding member in 1978. A meeting place for various community groups, it was from this base that Newmarch provided instruction in screen-printing to create posters for a number of interconnected groups motivated by the well-being of the local community and the desire for social change.

Collectives like the Community Association of Prospect (CAP) - a group formed initially to save the historic St Helen's House, which went on to advocate for local parks, playgrounds and community spaces, and which closely overlapped with the Poster Collective, provided a means for private individuals to be involved in grass roots movements to effect political and social change. They also help to build a connected community and a shared sense of identity. Newmarch placed her art expertise at the behest of these groups, and her studio at the heart of their activities.

Artist collectives that sprang up around this time in the 1970s were a way of artists connecting and supporting each other. In Adelaide, Newmarch was co-founder of two such groups: the Progressive Art Movement (PAM) (1974-1977), a group with close links to the union movement and workers' groups, and the Women's Art Movement (WAM) (1976-1984).

WAM, a large collective of women artists hosted The Women's Show at the Experimental Art Foundation, in August 1977. The large, open to all, un-curated exhibition contained around 350 works. Newmarch's contribution to this exhibition was a series of screen-prints: *Three Months of Interrupted Work, 1977*. The work, which depicts items neatly arranged on the artist's kitchen benchtop says something about the difficulty of combining domestic work and being a working artist. The work also affirms that a private view of an interior domestic setting – a kitchen benchtop is a legitimate subject for art.

The theme is also visited in *Washing Day, 1981*, first shown in the *Lovely Motherhood Show*, curated by Jude Adams, at the Experimental Art Foundation (1981). In this work, laundry drying on a clothes rack, separated by colour, is the subject of a series of photographs: connecting domestic life and art production, the home and the studio. The act of doing the washing, a usually unseen, and sometimes unappreciated task, is affirmed as a possibility for art.

Connecting the private unseen world of domestic tasks with the public practice of art making, shows that what goes on in the private sphere is a political matter and creating categories like public and private helps to establish and maintain systems of patriarchal power.

Recalling second wave feminism's refrain of, 'the personal is political', that personal experiences are connected to larger political structures, in a statement from 1981, Newmarch says: 'Art should be made out of personal experience and not out of art concerns. Personal experience is only a useful source of art when it is accompanied by an understanding of the social conditions in which it arises.'

The existence of the Gallery in Prospect is partly owed to the popularity of the Community Arts Show, one of the outcomes of Newmarch's residency with Prospect Council in 1982-1983. A gallery was to some extent necessitated as a means of finding a permanent home for this event, now in its 38th year, that invites Prospect residents to submit an artwork.

A connection means more than the point at which things meet or intersect, it also means a continuation; at the end of 2019, the Prospect Gallery was renamed to reflect its connection with Newmarch.