

Scratching The Surface

Margot Laver and Rhonda Stevens

Umbrella Studio

22nd February - 30th March 2008

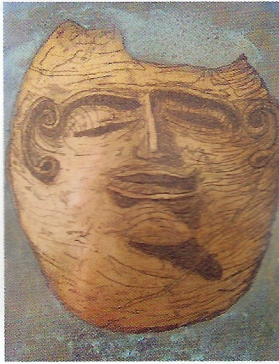
Meet The Press

Margot Laver and Rhonda Stevens presented a multilayered exhibition at Umbrella Studio in late February and for all of March. *Meet the Press* evolved as an exhibition idea as they worked side by side as fellow printmaking students at Pimlico Barrier Reef TAFE.

Their imagery was inspired by newspaper headlines from the *Weekend Australian*, which were collected over six months and served as titles for their prints. While each artist developed their own style, all of the works on paper were thoughtful and provocative.

The core theme of the exhibition was to 'investigate the power of the press while reflecting on the undercurrents and nuances affecting humanity'. It begs the question of how the average person copes with the current overload of information and the zealous media investigation of minor topics, while some important topics are buried, and how to discern the truth from the 'spin'. Both artists explored their own personal experiences and philosophies, which was reflected in their work.

Laver's works were contemplative and meditative, enticing the viewer to think about older civilisations, core values, and served to remind us of our own humanity and the overriding simplicity and beauty of life. This can be seen in her etchings, focusing on the inner structure of leaves. *Attuned to earth and sky* was a soft ground etching that focused on textures within the negative space around the leaf, while highlighting the central structure of the leaf. The image had been reworked a number of times and each print had a different treatment, reflecting its title. This referenced Laver's concept of the individual effects that communication can have on society.



Her silver-smithing background came to the fore in her work as she included a number of print plates as art works. *Ahead of its time* was a portrait on a copper plate, with imagery that smacked of that famous Mycenaean golden funeral mask. The shape of the face was also suggestive of ancient ceramic pots, featuring stylised portraits from other ancient civilisations.

Contrasted with Laver's more representational works, Stevens presented a series of abstract and textural images. Her palette consisted of earthy tones with strong tonal variations. Many of her prints were composed of two main elements, like two opposing forces vying for position. In her artist statement, Stevens said that her focus was on the underbelly – the constantly changing murky interior – and she clearly touched on this tension by the juxtaposition of elements.

Edging out the wedge created the greatest sense of energy. The top element threatens to descend on the lower element, which appears to be moving off the left side of the canvas. Given that



her works centred on images of threads and fabric, there was a delicate balance between light and dark and light and heavy.

For this exhibition, Stevens posed the questions, "Are we becoming alienated? How do we make sense of self as turbulence abounds?" Stevens answered this with her images that depicted elements that met and intertwined, signifying that there was an opportunity to make sense of our world – that sometimes, things happen beyond our control, where ends met, threads intertwine, and a common ground can be found.

While frame sizes, content, and media varied, the concept of Laver's and Stevens' work unified the exhibition. This was further deepened by the artists creating prints by means of a layered process, reiterating the layers of meaning within their work.

Laver and Stevens also made a collaborative video that commented on the humanity, which can be found amidst the turbulence, from the latest headlines.

The exhibition was thought-provoking and provided viewers with beautiful images.

Mandy Wildheart



Top: Rhonda Stevens, *No matter the language it's the brotherhood that counts*

Left: Margot Laver, *A head of its time*, copper plate, clear finish, etching with aquatint

Right: Margot Laver, *Submerged by the past*, etching with aquatint